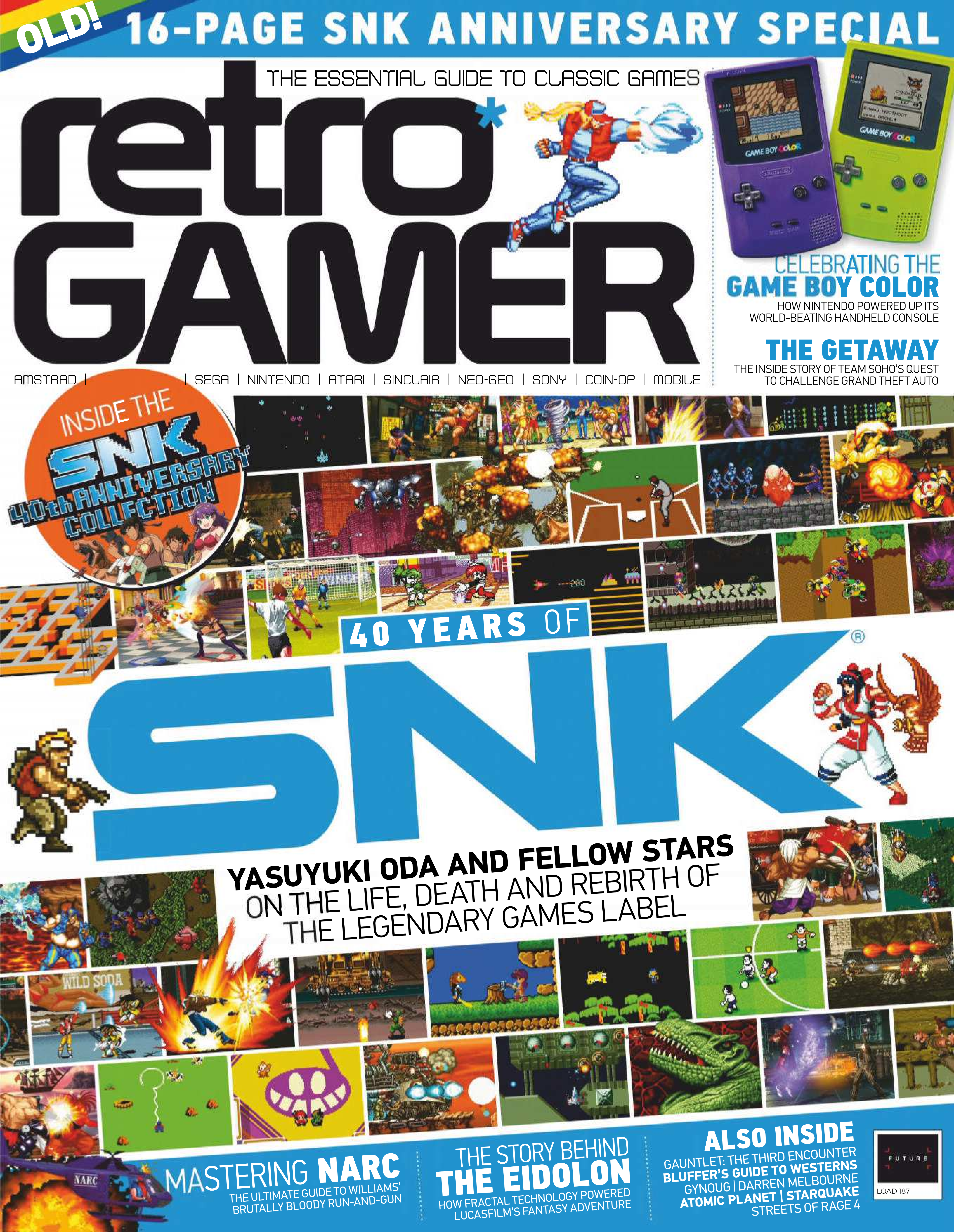


OLD!
16-PAGE SNK ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
retro GAMER
AMSTRAD | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE
CELEBRATING THE GAME BOY COLOR
HOW NINTENDO POWERED UP ITS WORLD-BEATING HANDHELD CONSOLE
THE GETAWAY
THE INSIDE STORY OF TEAM SOHO'S QUEST TO CHALLENGE GRAND THEFT AUTO
INSIDE THE SNK 40th ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION
40 YEARS OF SNK
YASUYUKI ODA AND FELLOW STARS ON THE LIFE, DEATH AND REBIRTH OF THE LEGENDARY GAMES LABEL
MASTERING NARC
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO WILLIAMS' BRUTALLY BLOODY RUN-AND-GUN
THE STORY BEHIND THE EIDOLON
HOW FRACTAL TECHNOLOGY POWERED LUCASFILM'S FANTASY ADVENTURE
ALSO INSIDE
GAUNTLET: THE THIRD ENCOUNTER
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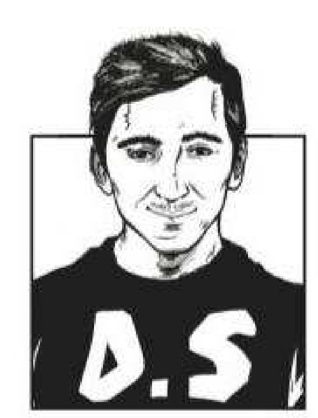
THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SNK GAME?



DARRAN JONES

Of course it's *Prehistoric Isle In 1930*. What on earth were you possibly expecting me to say?
Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Dead Cells
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



DREW SLEEP

I remember encountering an MVS proudly showing off *Metal Slug* at my local leisure centre. It's bombastic and satisfying to play: the perfect arcade game.
Expertise:
Psycho Solider, apparently
Currently playing:
Dark Souls III
Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII



NICK THORPE

Just one? Oof, that's hard. I'll go with *The King Of Fighters '98*, as I never seem to get bored of it thanks to its extensive cast.
Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)
Currently playing:
Valkyria Chronicles 4
Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



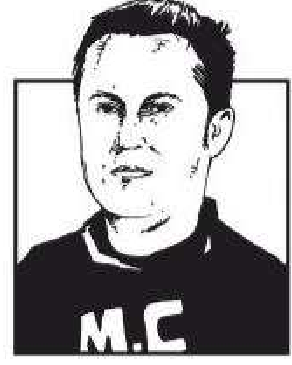
SAM RIBBITS

It has to be a *Metal Slug*, right? The original, *Metal Slug* X or *Metal Slug 3* especially. Neo-Geo games rarely disappoint.
Expertise:
Pixels
Currently playing:
Pool Panic
Favourite game of all time:
Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos



GRAEME MASON

I love my run-and-guns, so SNK's military breakthrough *Ikari Warriors* gets my vote.
Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing:
Grand Theft Auto V
Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



MARTYN CARROLL

Got to be *Guerrilla War*. Ralf and Clark were absent, but for me it worked better as the third *Ikari Warriors* game than the actual *Ikari III*.
Expertise:
Sinclair stuff
Currently playing:
The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



DAVID CROOKES

I'd have to say *Ikari Warriors* – moving in one direction while firing in another hit the spot for me.
Expertise:
Amstrad, Lynx adventures, Dizzy and PlayStation (but is it retro? Debate!)
Currently playing:
Fortnite
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



PAUL DRURY

I'm going proper retro and saying *Vanguard*. Bashing those four fire buttons remains a beloved childhood memory.
Expertise:
C64 mini updates
Currently playing:
Guacamelee 2
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep in Space



ANDREW FISHER

Top Hunter: Roddy & Cathy, I love the big, bold cartoonlike sprites.
Expertise:
Over 35 years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Wii U
Currently playing:
Mayhem In Monsterland
Favourite game of all time:
Paradroid



If you were a regular visitor to the arcades of the Eighties and Nineties, the output of SNK would have been instantly familiar to you. It was the company that always seemed to push innovative ideas in its early days and it was the one that was always using those quirky little joysticks where you could shoot and move in different directions.

While it wasn't as popular as Sega, Capcom or Atari (its earlier titles were rarely licensed as much as its competitors) it became a far bigger challenger, particularly towards Capcom, once it moved over to its Neo-Geo hardware and began delivering awesome arcade experiences that ported flawlessly to SNK's home console, the AES (providing you could afford the cost of entry).

Like many companies we have covered in **Retro Gamer**, the party didn't last forever and SNK faced eventually bankruptcy, only to be resurrected in 2003 as SNK Playmore, and more recently it has rebranded back to SNK in 2016. Suitably reinvigorated, SNK has returned to developing games, releasing *King Of Fighters XIV, SNK Heroines: Tag Team Frenzy* and a brand new mini console, as well as announcing a new *Samurai Shodown* game. It therefore seems the perfect time to look back at the developer that always pushed for technical excellence.

Enjoy the magazine!



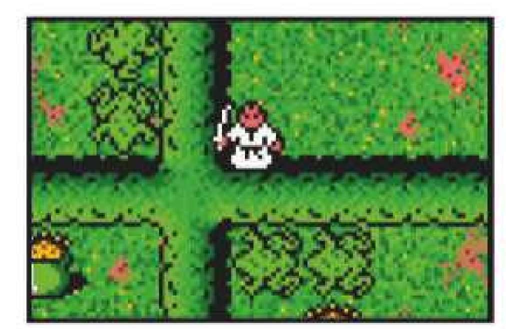
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>> Load 187 Breathing new life into classic games

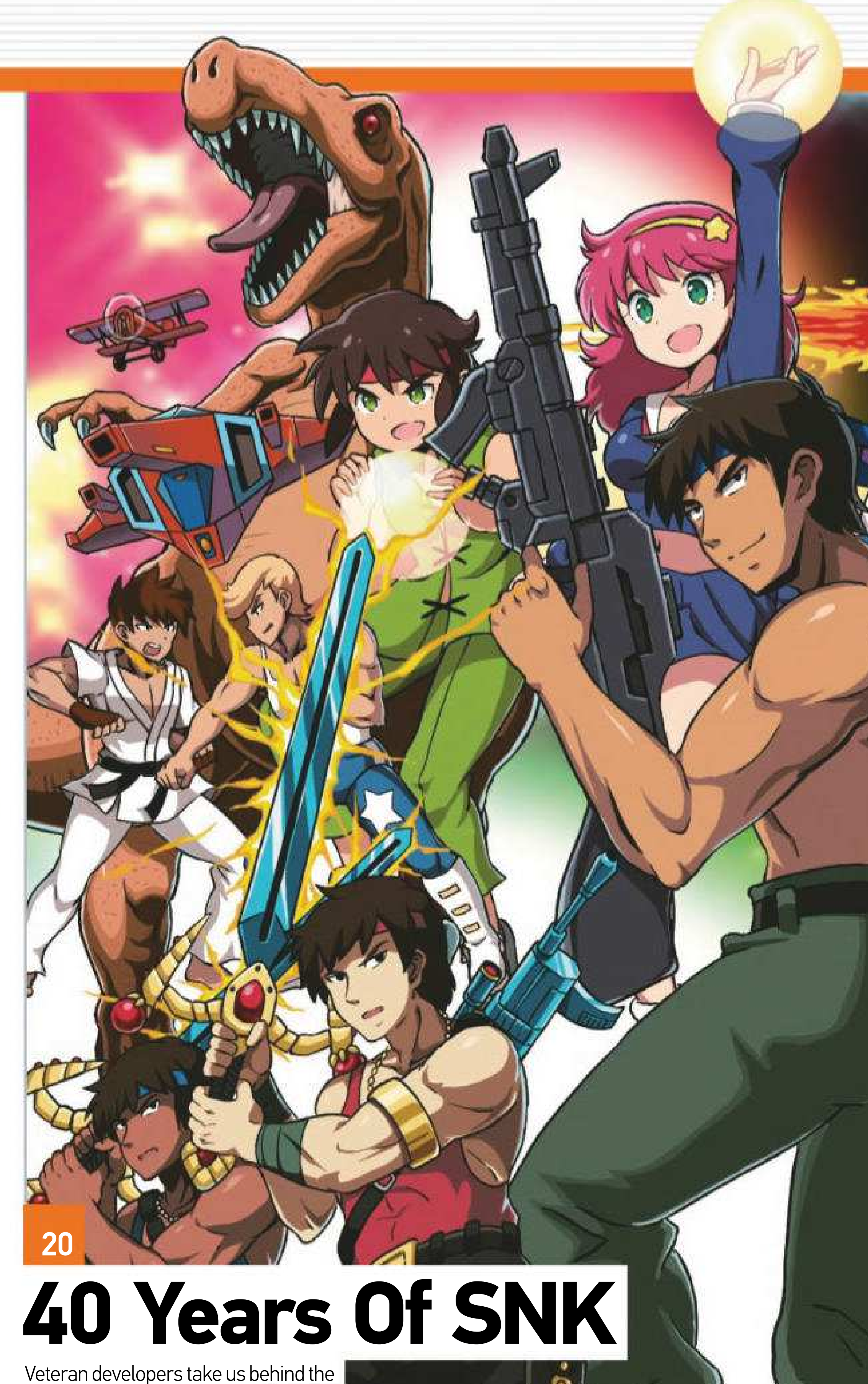




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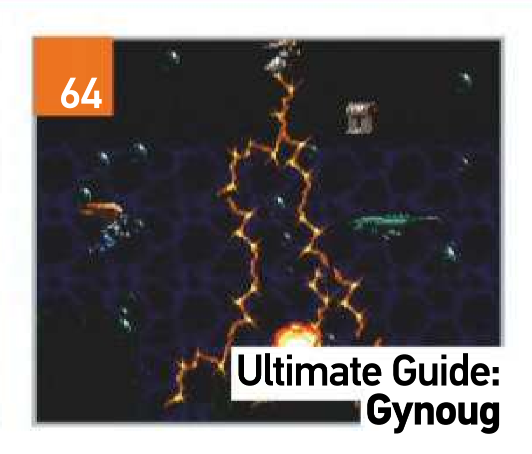


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50 Game Boy Color

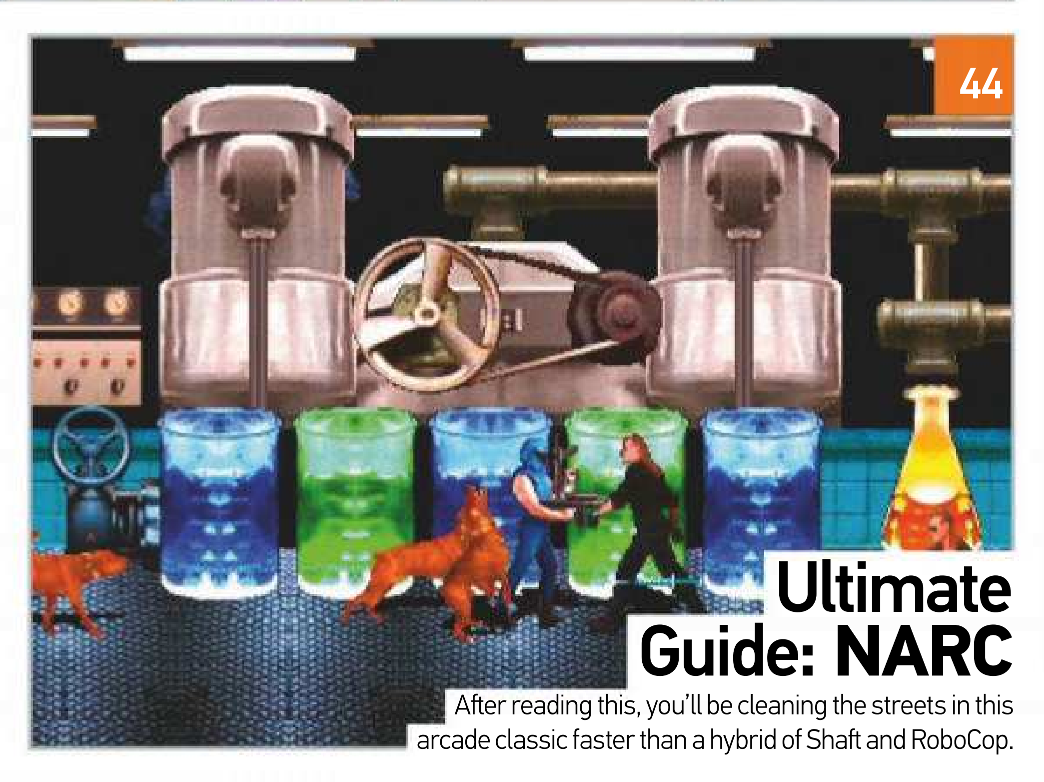


64 Ultimate Guide: Gynoug



84 The Making Of The Getaway

How Team Soho turned London into a sweary gangster-filled open world



44 Ultimate Guide: NARC

After reading this, you'll be cleaning the streets in this arcade classic faster than a hybrid of Shaft and RoboCop.

REVIEWS





ESSENTIALS



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THE GREAT SHOWMAN

Composers and fans mourn the passing of Ben Daglish

Ben Daglish had passion – for playing music live, for teaching children about music and for the C64's sound chip. His wife Sarah announced Ben's death on 1 October 2018, he died after a battle with lung cancer. The retro scene has lost an amazing raconteur, a superb performer and a great showman.

Ben learnt several instruments at school and performed as percussionist in the Sheffield Schools Orchestra. Ben won his school a BBC Micro in an essay contest, and was among the first to use it – meeting young programmer Tony Crowther. "I have known Ben for many years, we met when he was 15. He is probably the most likeable musician I have ever known, he could play any musical instrument and keep you fascinated for hours. His passing is a great loss, but his legacy will live on, with such memorable pieces of music as *Trap*, *William Wobbler*, and *Kettle*. These are just some of my games Ben worked on, that I am forever grateful. Ratt and Benn forever." When Tony needed music for Commodore 64 game *Percy The Potty Pigeon*, Ben typed in the notes for Chopin's *Funeral March* and a career started.



» Peter Harrap, Ben Daglish, Shaun Hollingworth and Tony Crowther at Games Britannia, 2012,

"We worked on *Auf Wiedersehen Monty* and had a real blast," Rob Hubbard remembers. "I've known him for over 30 years and we always got on really well. I recently thought about doing some kind of project with him, but kept putting it off. He was a very gifted, naturally talented musician and a one-off character. His music will always survive and new people will get to know it. We all loved Ben and he will be missed by all." In the Nineties, Ben bemoaned the "suits" starting to dominate the games industry. He returned to work on live music, with bands Loscoe State Opera and Cold Flame.

Composer Matt Gray looks back. "Ben wrote some of the finest game soundtracks in history. As a teenager I compiled a mixtape of my favourite SID tracks and amongst that was some of Ben's greatest work including *The Last Ninja* and my personal favourite *Trap*, which displayed a great understanding of what makes an epic piece of music work. I lost count of how many times I listened to that tape." Matt finally met Ben at some recent retro events. "You wouldn't have known Ben was ill. He found his way through the trauma of cancer with the same joviality he did through life. He was positive about so many aspects of life and never willing to see anything but good in people. I know he was devoted to his family. I know he lived and breathed music. And he did it all rather well."



» Ben gave a music workshop at Brinsworth Comprehensive during Games Britannia, 2011

Jarle Olsen of *Fastloaders* says, "Ben and I shared the stage for our *Ninja Musicology* release concert. When performing with us he pretty much just felt the music rather than thinking



» Chris Abbott and Ben take their bow after Back In Time Brighton, 2015.


» Stuck In D'80s rocking The Avenue club in Manchester, Back In Time 2005.

READER TRIBUTES

I met him a couple of times and he was friendly, down to earth and a thoroughly nice guy. I originally owned a Spectrum so to get a Commodore 64 and hear the amazing music it could produce was quite something. Ben's music accompanied the years of me growing up.
Wiredworm

RIP Ben. Your music seemed to be everywhere in the Eighties and my particular favourite was *Deflektor*, I still fire it up just to listen to the title music!
Acidbottle

Some of the most creative, original and system limit pushing pieces; I especially valued the style and execution of Ben's work on Atari ST – *3D Galax*, *FOFT*, *Northstar* and the brilliant *Super Cars* series, this music made the gaming experience shine.
Greyfox

Sad to hear this news, for my favourite soundtrack I'd choose *Krakout* – delightfully silly pieces that perfectly captured the mood of a thoroughly fun game.
Havantgotaclue



» Ben Daglish performing at Brighton's Back In Time event in 2015.

about it, just went with the flow and played his heart out. He was quite a character, born to be on stage and affected the audience with his charisma. The first time I met Ben he stood there watching me playing one of his songs, he told me that he tried to make the most impossible music to play and I just showed up playing every note! It was inspirational knowing him and I am proud of what we achieved together, adding to his musical legacy that will always carry on."

Ben was part of the *Back In Time* concerts, as performer and compere. Off-stage he was always happy to talk to fans and reminisce about his music. Mark Knight (TDK) performed alongside Ben with Stuck In D'80s. "I didn't meet Ben until Back in Time Live 2001, he became a good personal friend of mine. The guy was awesome. He is probably

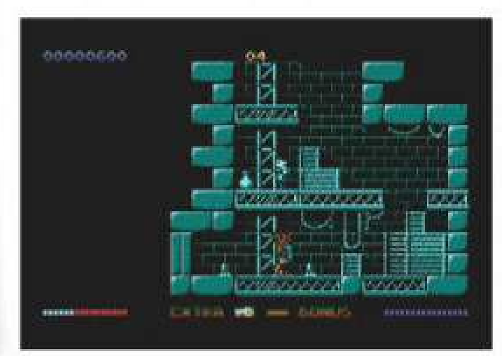

» [Amstrad CPC] *Switchblade* was elevated by Ben's magnificent soundtrack.

Photo by Warren Pilkington

"He was a very gifted, naturally talented musician and a one-off character"
Rob Hubbard

the best all-round musician I had ever met, being able to pick up virtually any instrument and get a half-decent sound out of it straight away, and as a frontman I've never known better. I consider myself very lucky to have performed with someone whom I could communicate with simply through eye contact and facial expression – very rare, and also a very satisfying thing to experience. Outside of performing he was a very engaging person. He had an immense wealth of knowledge. We were discussing starting a TV theme covers band. He already had the name – 'Mrs Slocombe's Pussy', which really summed Ben up. Ben was the most alive person I have ever met, even when he was dying. I'm proud that he considered me a friend, and I will sorely miss him."

Chris Abbott of C64 Audio says, "Working with Ben has been one of the privileges of my life. From an admirer in front of a TV screen to working with him on definitive orchestral versions



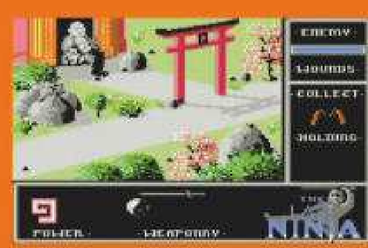
» Ben performing with Jarle Olsen of Fastloaders, Camden 2016.

of his best-known pieces. Ben was a showman, but his eye for detail and knowledge of music was encyclopaedic. He knew what he wanted, and was honest about what was crap, but he was creatively generous, a great teacher and a joy to be around. I like to think he'll turn up in spirit wherever a SID is played with spirit and passion. That would be very Ben indeed." The 8-Bit Symphony concert in June 2019 will feature orchestral arrangements of 8-bit music (including Ben's) and act as a fitting tribute to the man and his music. ★

WHAT TO LISTEN TO



TRAP (C64)
The title tune sounds even more impressive alongside the *Gladiator* demo, hidden in the game (type DEMO on the high-score table) and published separately as publicity for Compunet (where Ben had the handle BENN). The synchronised animation tells a sad story, with the gladiator pounding his drum in time.



THE LAST NINJA (C64)
Sharing composing duties with Anthony Lees (who passed away in 2016), Ben created memorable tunes for System 3's first ninja game. The *Wastelands* (loader and in-game) and *Wilderness* (in-game) compositions really set the tone. Hearing Ben perform them live (on flute and penny whistle) with the band *Fastloaders* was incredible.



AUF WIEDERSEHEN MONTY (SPECTRUM 128K)
Ben was equally adept with all the 8-bit computers and would go on to compose for 16-bit. This tune was composed jointly with Rob Hubbard, at Gremlin's request. The 128K-only Spectrum interpretation with its mysterious-sounding introduction holds up well against the C64 and Amstrad versions.

WHAT YEAR IS IT!?

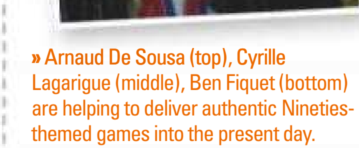
Retro-focused publisher DotEmu on resurrecting two classic Nineties franchises

It would seem that retro game revivals are like buses; you wait years for one to come along, and then you get two almost at once. We're referring, of course, to the very welcome news that bona-fide Nineties classics *Windjammers* and *Streets Of Rage* are being revived for sequels we thought we'd never see, and French publisher DotEmu is the driving force behind both projects.

Perhaps one of the most beloved Neo-Geo games of all time, *Windjammers* has been begging for a sequel for years, and it's finally getting one on the Nintendo Switch. "We wanted to bring *Windjammers* back for a long time," says DotEmu's head of marketing Arnaud De Sousa. "When we talked to the rights holders about bringing back their cult classic, we also asked them to let us make a new *Windjammers*, and they said yes."

Arnaud is keen to stress that this isn't a remake of the original game, which is out on Switch now. "With *Windjammers 2*, we're imagining what the original developers would have done nowadays if they had our technology and the 24 years of gaming evolution. *Windjammers 2* will offer new hand-drawn and animated graphics, new characters, new stages, new gameplay mechanics and so on."





» Arnaud De Sousa (top), Cyrille Lagarigue (middle), Ben Fiquet (bottom) are helping to deliver authentic Nineties-themed games into the present day.

Many people feel that the original *Windjammers* is perfect, and this perception has given DotEmu one of its sternest challenges. "It's quite the task to add gameplay features to an already great game," explains game designer Jordi Asensio. "You can easily break that perfect balance. So we're experimenting a lot and we will only keep what's really fun. For example, we added powered EX moves you can do when your EX gauge is full. It adds an interesting long-term strategic layer that was missing from the original."

A new *Windjammers* game is exciting enough, but the subsequent news that DotEmu is also rebooting *Streets Of Rage* in conjunction with Lizardcube (the team responsible for the amazing *Wonderboy: Dragon's Trap* remake) and *Guard Crush* (creator of the likeable indie beat-'em-up *Streets Of Fury*) sent the internet into a nostalgia-induced tailspin. "We had to show to Sega that we were serious," reveals Arnaud when asked how it all happened. "DotEmu has been making games for more than ten years now; I think our experience and the respect we have for the licences we work on resonates well with Japanese companies. With Lizardcube's *Wonder Boy: The Dragon's Trap*, we've also been able to show them how serious and dedicated we are toward their IPs."



» Concept art from Lizardcube featuring Axel's redesign.



» [Switch] Some may think the art style is heresy, but we're fans of *Windjammer 2*'s new direction. The original still holds up if you want pixel art!

» *Windjammers 2* is leaning heavily into Nineties nostalgia.

"We're trying to really improve, in the best possible ways, all aspects of the original games"
Ben Fiquet

Lizardcube's Ben Fiquet, who is serving as the project's art director, explains that the prior success of the *Wonderboy* reboot was instrumental in convincing Sega that the project was viable. "Since *Wonder Boy*, we have had an excellent relationship with Sega and we thought it would be an amazing project for everyone." As for why other efforts to create a fourth *Streets Of Rage* game failed, Ben has a theory. "I think most attempts were focused on making something radically different; what we're trying to do is to really improve, in the best possible ways, all aspects of the original games."

The final ingredient was *Streets Of Fury*, and the incredible game engine that has been refined and polished by its developer, Guard Crush. This will form the bedrock of the new *Streets Of Rage* title. "With *Streets Of Fury*, we were working for ten years on a beat-'em-up engine with Cyrille Lagarigue," explains Jordi, who is acting as designer on this title as well as *Windjammers 2*. Cyrille – who is acting as lead developer – likens the process to the creation of *Sonic Mania*, a game largely built by fans, for fans. "The success of *Sonic Mania* showed that Sega could trust a passionate team of external developers that already proved that they were capable with the genre, and give them one of their main licences."

Jordi explains that there will be a raft of enhancements included to make *Streets Of Rage 4* feel as fresh as possible. "One is the juggles; they allow you to do longer combos and co-op combos. The other is the special move life regain, we decided to stick with the life-draining system, only now you can regain that life back if you hit enemies with normal attacks – but if you're hit you'll lose all the 'gambled' life. It makes special moves powerful, but risky." Cyrille adds that other improvements are expected, too, such as enemies not vanishing off the edge of the screen – a common issue with practically any scrolling fighter you could mention.

There are still a few things the team wishes to keep under wraps, however.



» [PC] Blaze and Axel are the only heroes that have been revealed, but DotEmu says to stay tuned for more.

The involvement of Yuzo Koshiro – who composed the amazing music for the first three games – is yet to be confirmed, although Arnaud insists that the developers are aware of how important the soundtrack is to the series. Ben also refuses to flat-out confirm that the game will come with an optional pixel-based graphics mode, something that was included in *The Dragon's Trap*; he merely suggests that the team is considering various options at present. So far, only Alex and Blaze have been shown as playable characters; Ben admits that others will be included, but can't say who just yet.

Let's not dwell on unconfirmed stuff for too long, however: the fact that these two legendary Nineties classics are getting resurrected is cause for some serious celebration, and as Arnaud explains, the developers behind this renaissance are just as excited as the potential players. "It feels like a kid's dream coming true! I won't lie by saying there's no pressure, but with such a dream team of hardcore fans of both games, I'm confident that we'll have two amazing titles!"



» *Streets Of Rage 4*'s trailer showed Axel's new grizzled design – complete with a brooding beard.

ALL THE GAMES!

Vancouver-based Liquid Media has revealed it has bought the rights to 65 classic videogames. The company's chairman, Joshua Jackson (who you might know from *Fringe* and *Dawson's Creek*) is excited about the acquisition, saying: "So many people, myself included, are returning to the classics. The nostalgia brought on by this resurgence in retro games connects us to our childhoods – and creates incredible demand."

What's interesting about the acquisition is that many of the games in question (which include NFL games, *Bubble Bobble*, *Wetrix*, and *Street Fighter: The Movie*) are licensed, which means Liquid Media will likely need to make more deals to rerelease the games. We're also unsure if anyone is still interested in playing *Antz Racing* in 2018. We could be wrong, though.

CAPCOM GOES TO THE MOVIES

Capcom recently revealed that two big franchises are heading to the silver screen. First up is a live-action *Monster Hunter* movie, which has already started filming in South Africa and Namibia. Directorial duties have been handed to Paul WS Anderson, and Milla Jovovich, Ron Perlman and Tip Harris are also involved, with Perlman playing the leader of the monster hunter crew.

Capcom has also confirmed a *Mega Man* live-action movie, which has been rumoured since 2015. Unlike *Monster Hunter*, very little is known about it, although we do know that the *Catfish* team of Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman are sharing writing and directorial duties. It's also been revealed that *Heroes*' Masi Oka and Chernin Entertainment (of *Planet Of The Apes* fame) will be coproducing the movie.



PALM-SIZED PLAYSTATION TO HIT STORES

SONY BECOMES THE LATEST PUBLISHER TO ANNOUNCE A MINIATURE CONSOLE

Nintendo's range of mini systems have proven to be extremely popular with fans, so it's perhaps not surprising that other companies have been looking at releasing their own versions. We've already mentioned Sega's mini Mega Drive (which has recently had a rethink and no longer features the involvement of AtGames) while SNK has its miniature arcade variant stuffed with Neo-Geo gems, which is on sale now. Sony is the latest to enter the market, having revealed its PlayStation Classic. It has also been quite close-lipped about its new project, with very little information about the machine available as we went to press.

What we do know is that the machine is due on sale from 3 December and that it is retailing at £90. The device will feature two controllers and will be roughly 45 per cent smaller than the original. It also features a built-in virtual memory card, which will allow you to save games on the fly like the other mini consoles, which are currently available. HDMI support is also included, meaning it is designed to run on modern televisions.

As with any miniature gaming device, it's the games themselves which are typically the biggest drawer, and so far Sony has revealed five: *Final Fantasy VII*, *Tekken 3*, *Jumping Flash!*, *Wild Arms* and *R4 Ridge Racer Type 4*. There are still 15 games to be announced, so we're hoping obvious big hitters like *Tomb Raider*, *Crash Bandicoot*, *Gran Turismo* and *Metal Gear Solid* make the final cut, if they haven't been revealed by the time you read this.

Sony's 32-bit debut console was a game-changer on its release, helping to usher in 3D gaming and showcasing that titles could be far more expansive and immersive than they were during the 8-bit and 16-bit generations. It will be interesting to not only see the final list of planned games, but how the titles themselves will hold up once we finally get our hands on the machine. More news when we get it.



» [PlayStation] It's no surprise to learn that *Final Fantasy VII* is one of the first games announced.





» With the PlayStation Mini, Sony is targeting gamers with a nostalgic affection for its original console.



» [PlayStation] *Jumping Flash!* is great fun, so we're pleased to see it as one of the included games.



Ys VIII: Lacrimosa Of Dana Limited Edition

It's certainly not cheap, but fans of Falcom's long-running RPG series are well served with this latest limited edition from NISA Europe. The lavish box set comes with a physical copy of the Switch version of Falcom's game, which we reviewed when it was first released on PS Vita and awarded 80%.

In addition to the game, this new box set also features a CD soundtrack containing 15 of *Lacrimosa Of Dana*'s best tracks, as well as a hardcover book that's been styled to look like an adventurer's logbook. There's also an additional soft-cover art book, which is filled with all manner of gorgeous imagery. While it doesn't feature the bookends that appeared in the PS Vita and PS4 limited editions from last year, you do get a rather lovely letter opener in the shape of one of the game's swords.

Price: £89.99 **From:** store.niseurope.com

PICK OF THE MONTH



Beyond The Borders: A Fantastic Journey To The Outer Rims Of The 68000

Even if you're not a fan of the Atari ST, it's hard not to be impressed by *Beyond The Borders*. It not only gives a fascinating insight into the home computer scene during the early Nineties, but also has extensive interviews with many of the demo artists who were prominent during the time. Filled with rare historical imagery and some entertaining interviews, it's an engaging read that will make you feel like you're reliving the era again.

Price: £3.92 (Kindle)
From: amazon.co.uk

The Pac-Man Principle: A User's Guide To Capitalism

Capitalism and *Pac-Man* might seem like odd bedfellows, but sociologist, Alex Wade puts across some very strong arguments in his breezy book. Full of interesting accounts of the game and with an afterword by *Pac-Man*'s creator, Toru Iwatani, its a fun read that never outstays its welcome.

Price: £7.74
From: amazon.co.uk

Tomb Raider Coasters

The latest *Tomb Raider* gear from Numskull will immediately take you back to the late Nineties. Every single one of them features the original artwork from the first four *Tomb Raider* games, complete with the PlayStation logo and various accolades. They're heat-resistant and easy to clean, while the felt feet ensure your coaster won't move while it's being used.

Price: £12.99
From: numskull.com



Retro Gamer Subscription

It's worth highlighting that with Christmas just around the corner there's never been a better time to subscribe to your favourite retro gaming magazine. There's a great offer on at the moment and a sub ensures you won't pay extra on the newsstand. Our advice is to circle this entry and leave the page open for a loved one to take action.

Price: From £24.99
From: myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

Here's my bio... Paul Rose
Paul Rose is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator and chief writer of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes for kids TV, but can still be found rambling on about games, old and new, for his daily website, Digitiser2000.com.

Out of character

Something I miss from that golden era of gaming we grew up with is the absence of character. No, not characters, plural, but character. Or, at least, the absence of the current desire to give game characters depth.

It has been driven home to me twice this year through the latest instalments in two long-running series – *God Of War* and *Tomb Raider*. Prior to the recent reboots, which served as an attempt to flesh-out Kratos and Lara Croft, respectively, we weren't given much more to go on than the gameplay itself, the characters' appearance, and a bit of scene-setting context. Both franchises were ones that I loved, but the latest interpretations of them have weakened both series for me.

I've long believed that storytelling should make the most of the medium it's in, but all too often modern games think they're movies or TV shows, often striving to be profound. I mean, we can lay the blame firmly at the door of the games we grew up on (yes, I am giving you side-eye, Cinemaware), but games back then were limited by the technology.

Consequently, our time spent with, say, Miner Willy or Wally Week would be about the game itself. There were no cutscenes deepening the story or going into the characters' tortured backgrounds. We've never needed to know about the emotional baggage the bloke in *Chuckie Egg* brought with him. The adventures were our own to have. We *were* Miner Willy.

Likewise, I'm a firm believer that Lara Croft – as she was originally in those early *Tomb Raider* games – became such an icon because we knew so little about her. There was something remote and unobtainable about the character, and consequently it allowed the player to become immersed in her adventures. We never needed to understand her origins; she existed as a cool-looking avatar, a character designed around the mechanics of some groundbreaking gameplay. Indeed, shouldn't that always be the way with games?

Surely, the concept game must come first, and if you get lucky and create a Mario or a Sonic, then that's a bonus? But who and what those characters are should always, as far as games are concerned, be the secondary consideration.

Don't get me wrong; I think it is possible to tell stories in games (some of my favourite stories of all time happened in point-and-click adventures). Plus, I'm all for giving games a bit of emotional clout. At the same time, the modern approach of stealing from the language of cinema feels like the wrong way to go about.

I believe that devs need to stop looking across the aisle at movies, and look into gaming's history. The world fell in love with games because they were games; we played them, not watched them.

We've enough passive entertainment experiences already; games are the one medium where we get to become a part of the action, where we're transported to, an interact with, fantastical places. *

> "Devs need to stop looking across the aisle at movies, and look into gaming's history"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK  @RetroGamer_Mag  darran.jones@futurenet.com 

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

NOVEMBER 2001 – With legacy formats winding down and new machines yet to hit the UK, there's plenty to choose from if you're PS2 owner and less for everyone else – join Nick Thorpe to find out what was on offer

NEWS NOVEMBER 2001

On 4 November, the film adaptation of *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone* premiered at the Odeon in Leicester Square, London. Warner Bros had paid £1 million for the rights to the film in 1999, and spent $125 million creating it. The film made a whopping $974.8 million dollars at the box office worldwide, making it the second-highest grossing film of all time.

George Harrison, the lead guitarist for The Beatles, passed away on 29 November at the age of 58. It had been revealed that the musician had been suffering from cancer earlier in the year, which had begun in the lung and spread to his brain. Harrison passed at a friend's home, and had his ashes scattered in the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in India following his cremation.

On 30 November, police in Renton, Washington arrested Gary Ridgway for the murders of four women. Ridgway, also known as the Green River Killer, had killed an unconfirmed number of women (believed to be at least 71) in the Eighties and Nineties. In 2003, Ridgway agreed to a plea bargain that saw him confess to a number of the murders to avoid the death sentence. He was ultimately convicted of 49 murders and received multiple life sentences without parole.



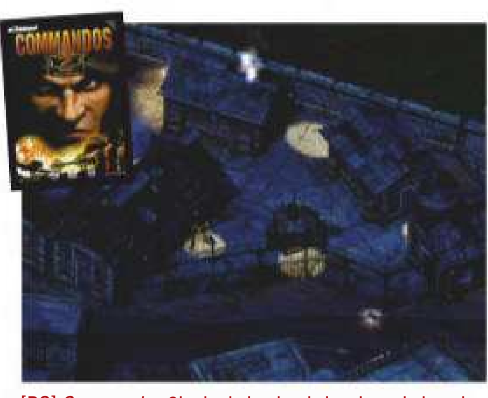
[Xbox] For all the next-gen tech hype, it was old fashioned game design that earned all the praise this month.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM NOVEMBER 2001

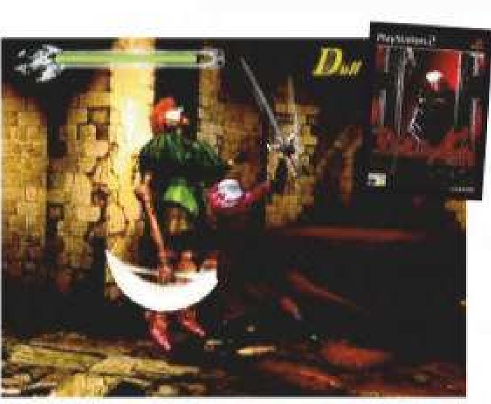
Hark, what's that sound? Why, it's the thud of Microsoft's gargantuan Xbox making a craterous impact upon the North American videogame market. The console launched on 15 November with an asking price of $299, and within a week 550,000 of the machines had been sold – none too shabby, especially for a first-time entrant into the console market. As expected, the first-person shooter *Halo: Combat Evolved* was the big seller amongst the console's early games.

That wasn't the only console to launch in North America this month, as the GameCube followed a few days later on 18 November at $199. Nintendo claimed even stronger first-week sales than Microsoft, stating that its initial shipment of 740,000 units was almost sold out. Unsurprisingly, *Luigi's Mansion* was the top seller on the purple fun box. *Edge*'s reviews of the Japanese launch games were in too, with *Super Monkey Ball* emerging as top banana with a 9/10 score. The rest of the bunch were ripe too, with *Luigi's Mansion* scoring 8/10 and *Wave Race: Blue Storm* scoring 7/10. PAL players waiting to join the fun would suffer more uncertainty, as 'Spring 2002' was the most specific release date Nintendo would confirm.

Despite all the excitement over shiny new toys, it was the PS2 that had the lion's share of killer games in the review sections this month. Most wanted was *Grand Theft Auto III*, the first 3D entry in the open world crime series. *Play*'s Will Johnston was incredibly impressed by the level of freedom on offer, as well as the Liberty City environment, claiming "this is a living city and you can hear it breathe as you go about your business". The game scored 98%, and was declared "The finest game the planet has ever seen." *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*'s Sam Richards was slightly less impressed and offered 8/10, commending the technical achievement of building the city and the driving missions, but criticising the on-foot missions as "movement control is never quite ideal and the shot targeting system is suspect."



[PC] *Commandos 2* looked absolutely lovely and played well, but posed a brutal challenge.



[PS2] *Devil May Cry* was sensational for the time. Let's just not mention the terrible PAL conversion.

THIS MONTH IN…



NGC

N64 Magazine is dead, long live *NGC*! Issue 60 emerges from its cocoon a beautiful butterfly – the redesign was minimal, and the mag would be thoroughly overhauled in short order. To celebrate leaving behind the dusty old N64 for the shiny new GameCube, the magazine reviewed no GameCube games and two N64 games.



PC Zone

"Deaf gamers dislike *Half-Life*," reveals Game & Able, a feature on creating accessible games for players with disabilities. Why? The game lacks subtitles, and has no visual indication of enemies approaching from behind. Other conditions addressed include motor impairments, colour blindness, multiple sclerosis and quadriplegia.



Play

"Heh. Heh. Heh. We have leader of *Play*, now like Rolling Stones say have painted black. Now he darker, like mag-zine. Ha. Ha. Ha. But still no tasty. Bad lunch, no meat, so give back for 20 gallons water. Yoo pay soon or BB-Gun go in even further." We don't know what reader King Gremlin wants. "PS Alpine spring water only plez." Right.



[GameCube] Do you want to take the difficult path, or the even more difficult path?



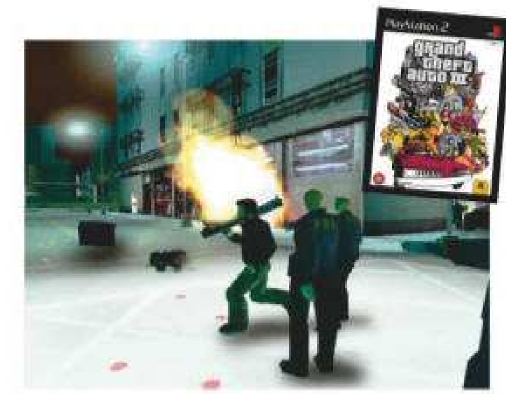
[N64] Remember when people thought *Pokémon* was a fad that would fade away?

Devil May Cry was also exciting the critics on import. Having originally been envisioned as a new take on *Resident Evil*, Capcom's new action adventure instead followed Dante, a demon hunter who can perform incredible combo attacks with his gun and sword. *Play*'s Simon Cann was of the opinion that "Someone at Capcom has obviously been watching a lot of John Woo movies" due to the stylish action, and that the game was "a groundbreaking title" that suffered from being able to be finished in "just over a day." The game scored 93%, and *Edge* also felt that the game was worth 8/10.

There was plenty more for PS2 owners to get excited about before Christmas too, judging by the packed review pages of *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine*. *WWF Smackdown!: Just Bring It* had been hotly anticipated by fans of simulated violence simulations, as well as fans of Limp Bizkit due to its inclusion of one William Frederick Durst, and an exclusive 8/10 review suggested it was worth the wait. If that wasn't enough American sporting entertainment for you, *Madden NFL 2002* scored 9/10. A trio of sequels each garnered 8/10 - Konami's survival horror *Silent Hill 2* (which also got 7/10 from *Edge*), Namco's lightgun shooter *Time Crisis II* and its platformer *Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil*. Criterion's crash-happy arcade racer *Burnout* scored 8/10 too.

PC gamers had some games to get excited for too. Pyro Studios' real-time tactics game *Commandos 2: Men Of Courage* retained the original game's Second World War setting, but delivered a more refined take with better graphics, more accessible difficulty and an improved interface. The game scored 91% in *PC Zone*, and was described as "More detailed than real life, and just as addictive." The arrival of Sports Interactive's latest life consuming football management game, *Championship Manager: Season 01/02*, was greeted with a 92% review in *PC Zone* by Steve Hill. This review also contained a box out on *Championship Manager* addiction, in which Steve claimed to have lost control of his sleeping patterns and begun to dress like Jeff Bridges in *The Big Lebowski*.

The older consoles also had some noteworthy releases this month. *Spider-Man 2: Enter Electro* made its debut on the PlayStation to a rather warm welcome, scoring 85% in *Play* and 9/10 in Official *PlayStation 2 Magazine*. *NGC*, the rebranded successor to *N64*



[PS2] *Grand Theft Auto*'s leap into 3D space was the most lucrative thing since actual crime.

Magazine, gave a farewell to the old console with two new reviews. *Mario Party 3* scored 72%, with Geraint Evans commenting "don't expect to be playing it this time next week". Alan Maddrell felt that *Pokémon Stadium 2* was "A beautiful game that improves on the original with ease," awarding it 90%. The Game Boy Color also got a moment in the spotlight, with *Pokémon Crystal* earning 4/5 in the magazine's Planet Game Boy section.

Join us again in December, when everything goes mad and there's frankly too much to review.



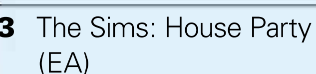

NOVEMBER 2001

PC

1. Max Payne (Take 2)
2. Championship Manager 01/02 (Eidos)
3. The Sims: House Party (EA)
4. The Sims (EA)
5. Half-Life: Generations (Vivendi)

PLAYSTATION

1. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (Activision)
2. Tomb Raider II (Eidos)
3. Driver (Infogrames)
4. Brian Lara Cricket (Codemasters)
5. Simpsons Wrestling (Fox Interactive)

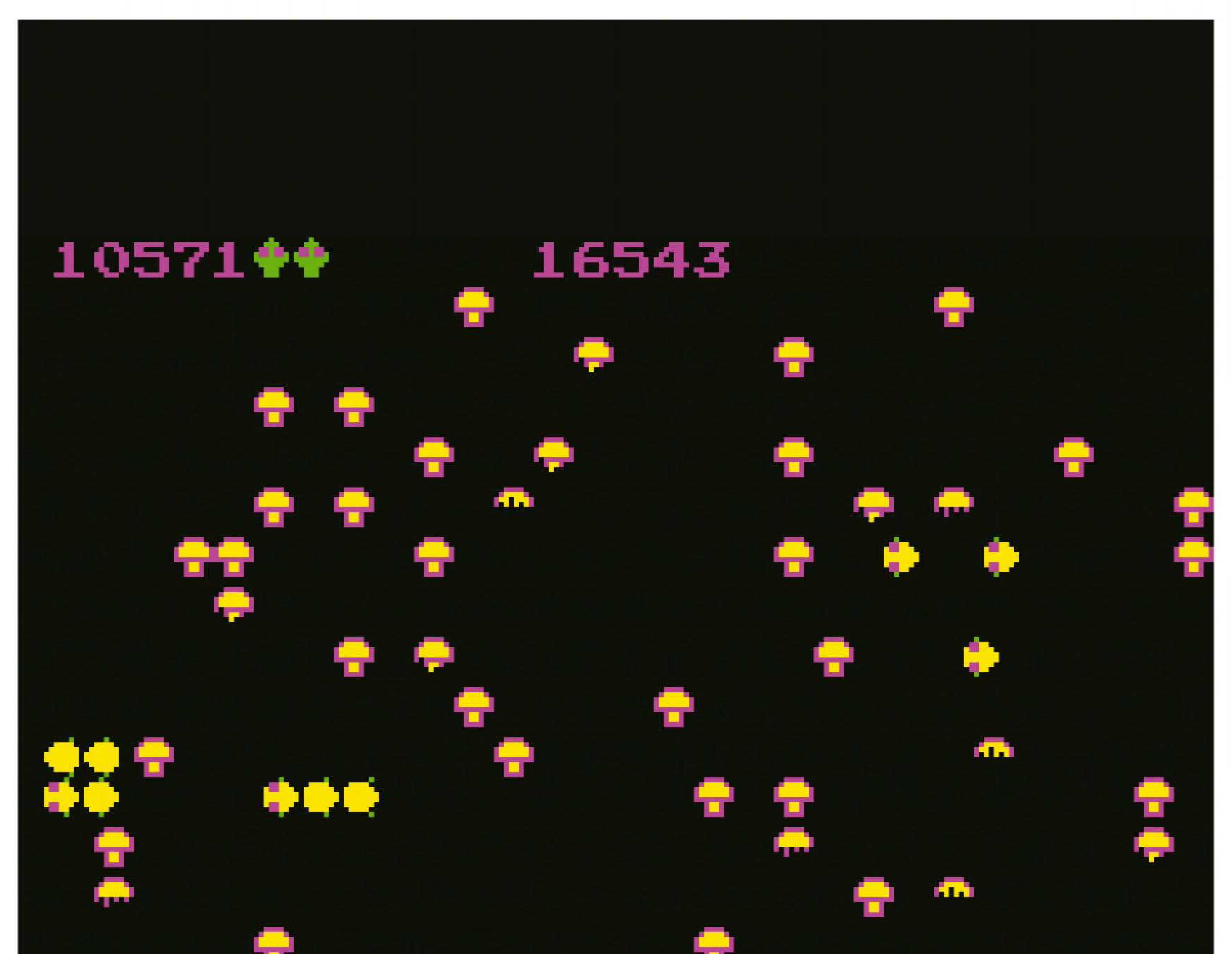


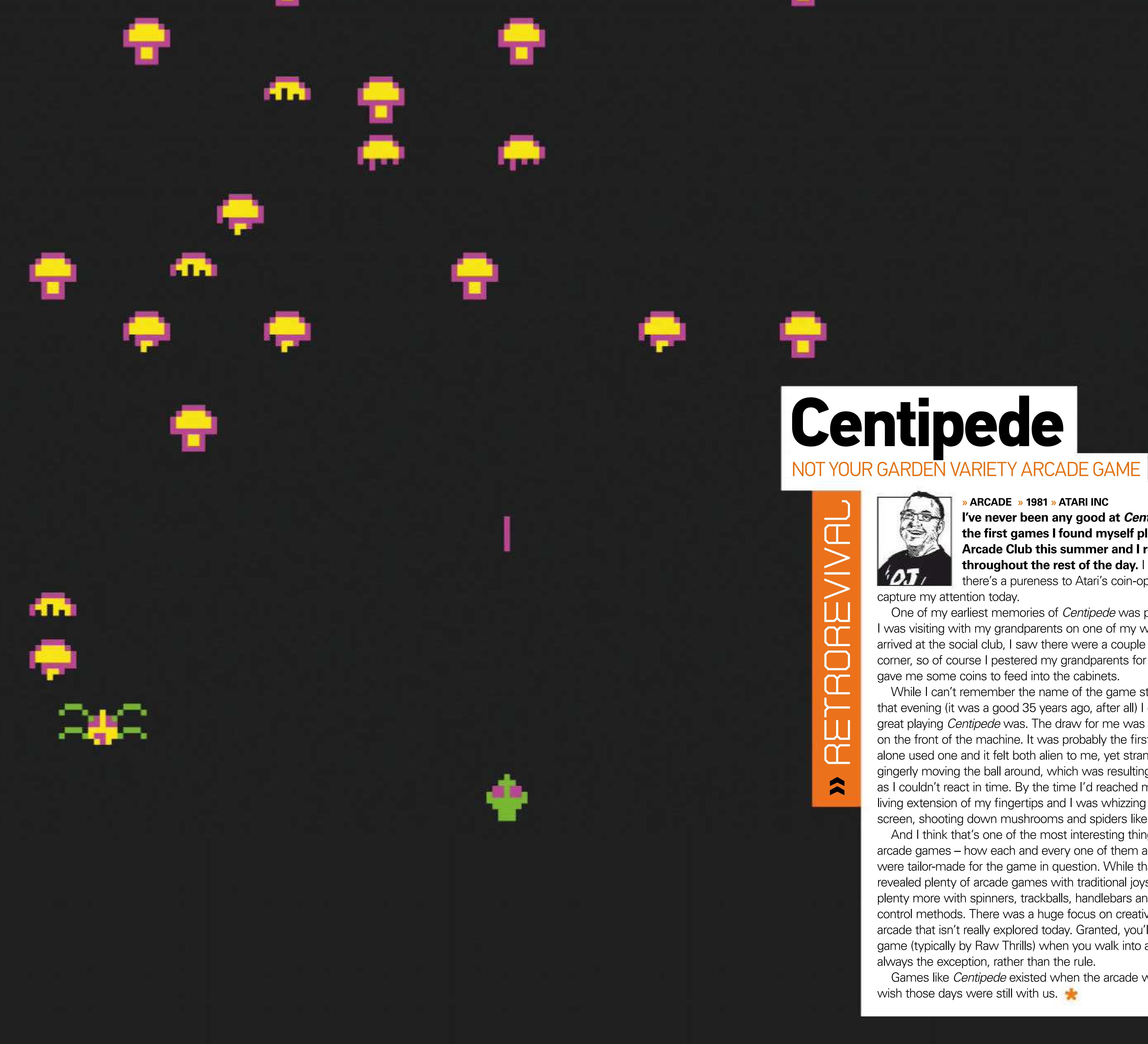
PLAYSTATION 2

1. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec (Sony)
2. Onimusha: Warlords (Capcom)
3. Red Faction (THQ)
4. NBA Street (EA)
5. Escape From Monkey Island (Activision)

MUSIC

1. Have You Ever (S Club 7)
2. If You Come Back (Blue)
3. Who Do You Love Now (Stringer) (Riva feat. Dannii Minogue)
4. Queen Of My Heart (Westlife)
5. Walk On (U2)


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» RETROREVIVAL

Centipede

NOT YOUR GARDEN VARIETY ARCADE GAME

» ARCADE » 1981 » ATARI INC

I've never been any good at *Centipede* but it's one of the first games I found myself playing when I visited Arcade Club this summer and I regularly went back to it throughout the rest of the day. I love a good shoot-'em-up and there's a pureness to Atari's coin-op blaster that still manages to capture my attention today.

One of my earliest memories of *Centipede* was playing it at a social club that I was visiting with my grandparents on one of my weekend visits. When we arrived at the social club, I saw there were a couple of arcade machines in the corner, so of course I pestered my grandparents for long enough until they finally gave me some coins to feed into the cabinets.

While I can't remember the name of the game standing next to *Centipede* that evening (it was a good 35 years ago, after all) I do vividly remember how great playing *Centipede* was. The draw for me was the trackball that sat proudly on the front of the machine. It was probably the first time I'd ever seen one, let alone used one and it felt both alien to me, yet strangely familiar. Initially I was gingerly moving the ball around, which was resulting in many unneeded deaths, as I couldn't react in time. By the time I'd reached my fifth 10p the ball felt like a living extension of my fingertips and I was whizzing around the lower parts of the screen, shooting down mushrooms and spiders like a boy possessed.

And I think that's one of the most interesting things I miss about the early arcade games – how each and every one of them appeared to have controls that were tailor-made for the game in question. While that walk around Arcade Club revealed plenty of arcade games with traditional joysticks setups, there were plenty more with spinners, trackballs, handlebars and a host of other unusual control methods. There was a huge focus on creativity in the early days of the arcade that isn't really explored today. Granted, you'll see the odd impressive game (typically by Raw Thrills) when you walk into an arcade today, but they're always the exception, rather than the rule.

Games like *Centipede* existed when the arcade was king, and sometimes I wish those days were still with us. *

40 YEARS SN

FROM ARCADE MACHINES TO CONSOLES AND FROM FIGHTING GAMES TO THEME PARKS, **SNK** HAS DONE IT ALL. WE SPEAK TO STAFF FROM THE COMPANY'S PAST AND PRESENT TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF THE LAST FOUR DECADES

Words by Nick Thorpe

OF
NK

With 2018 being SNK's 40th anniversary year, the company is celebrating as its fans would hope. SNK is healthy and creating brand-new games, as well as celebrating its heritage with a mini Neo-Geo and a compilation of early arcade games. But its road to this milestone hasn't always been a smooth one. The company has been one of the arcade industry's top players and was the first to prove that a market exists for luxury consoles, but it has also experienced bankruptcy and even seemed to have left the videogames market behind in the not-too-distant past. But whatever its fortunes, SNK has always been a fascinating company to follow.

SNK was founded as Shin Nihon Kikaku (New Japanese Product) in 1973 by Eikichi Kawasaki, but its history as a videogame developer only dates back to its incorporation as a stock company in July 1978. The company started with capital of 3 million yen (less than $25,000 at the time), with the company setting up its office in Higashiosaka. SNK's earliest games were *Ozma Wars* and *Safari Rally*, but its first major hit was a shoot-'em-up called *Vanguard* which offered four-way shooting and levels which scrolled in different directions. The game didn't just hit big in Japan, as *Centuri* licensed it for the North American market and the game's success there saw it licensed for home conversion by Atari. This success was followed by more games including *Lasso*, *Marvin's Maze* and *Vanguard II*.

The early years of SNK were characterised by the explosive growth of the company. By the end of 1983, the company had ten times its starting capital. In 1984 it moved its headquarters to Osaka, where the company grew at a rapid pace. In September 1985 it had increased its capital by 18 million yen, another 60 per cent growth in less than two years, and the following year was a landmark. 1986 saw the company officially change its name to SNK, which it had been using on marketing materials for some years prior, and it introduced some notable hit games that proved popular with gamers such as *Ikari Warriors* and *Athena*. Both games received follow-ups to capitalise on their success in the form of *Victory Road* and *Psycho Soldier*. The company also moved into the development of games for home systems, most notably the NES.



» [Arcade] *Ozma Wars* is a fantastic early take on the shoot-'em-up genre and it still presents a challenge today.

HARDCORE HARDWARE

SNK released four distinct home systems in the Nineties – here are the fast facts on each



NEO-GEO AES

RELEASE DATE: 1990
FINAL RELEASE: *Samurai Shodown V Special*, 2004
LAUNCH PRICE: ¥58,000 / $649 / £399
GAMES: 117
NOTES: Initially offered as a 'Gold System' bundle with two controllers and a game. Later models included the Controller Pro joystick.

NEO-GEO CD

RELEASE DATE: 1994
FINAL RELEASE: *The King Of Fighters '99*, 1999
LAUNCH PRICE: ¥49,800 / $399 / £399
GAMES: 97
NOTES: Three versions of the console were released – a front-loading model, a top-loading model and the CDZ.

NEO-GEO POCKET

RELEASE DATE: 1998
FINAL RELEASE: *Samurai Shodown!*, 1998
LAUNCH PRICE: ¥7,800
GAMES: 9
NOTES: 39 Neo-Geo Pocket Color games also support the original Neo-Geo Pocket hardware.

> "GAME CONSOLES IN THE EIGHTIES HAD VERY LIMITED DISPLAY SPECS"
> Hiroko Yokoyama

One of the developers that joined during this period was Kasatoshi Yoshino. "I would say there were roughly 100 people working at SNK when I joined the company," remembers Yoshino, who joined in April 1985. Hiroko 'Minako' Yokoyama, who joined SNK in April 1987 as an illustrator and graphic artist, provides a little more detail. "I mostly remember the development division, which was divided at that time into four planning, one sound and one software departments for approximately 30 employees. There were four to five people in each planning department." Although videogames tends to be considered a male-dominated industry, Yokoyama wasn't the only woman at SNK. "There was at least one female staff working in every development department, but also at the sound and the marketing divisions."

Yoshino's job as a developer was a varied and enjoyable one. "I took care of the follow-up on the planning and debug on all the titles released between 1985 and 1987," he explains. "I was really excited to be involved in game development. I had a lot of fun and good times when I went for lunch with my coworkers, and talked with them about videogaming." However, this excitement went hand in hand with hard work. "I also remember being busy, sleeping for a few hours in a hotel close to the company, and working from early in the morning until the middle of the night searching for eventual bugs and issues on titles just before release."

Yoshino's recollection of SNK as a place where enthusiastic gamers worked hard explains how he ended up doubling up as a sound composer on *ASO* and other games. Despite the size of the company at the time, there was a surprising degree of flexibility around each person's job. "As the sound department had no staff when I joined SNK along with a programmer, we started working at creating sound. I was later promoted as 'super adviser', which allowed me to give my opinion and advice on sound creation." Continuing from that, Yoshino later became SNK's PR manager. "I was mainly doing marketing research. I was in charge of events in collaboration with game magazines, planned game strategy books, community fan books such as '*Video Game Land*', telephone services, and many more projects."

Yoshino wasn't the only one who found that SNK was a place to experience new challenges. "I remember it was very hard at the beginning as I had to learn and remember tons of things," explains Yokoyama. "I was from design school, which means drawing was the only thing I was able to do when I joined SNK. I had no experience at all with computers, and had a lot of busy days at SNK.

"It depended on the game, but I was usually involved from half a year to one year per project I also remember working two full years on a project. Dot pixels before the Neo-Geo were mainly made with Sony's SMC-777 development tools. SMC-777s were used to create *Ikari Warriors* on MSX-2. We had a lot of difficulties and headaches when porting arcade games to home consoles, due to the technical limitations of those systems. Game consoles in the Eighties had very limited display specs."

Yokoyama's explanation of the design philosophy behind SNK's games at this time goes a long way to explaining their success. "Mr Oba [Koji Obata] made



» [Above] *Fantasy* was an impressive early release from SNK that featured all sorts of varied levels and a strong narration.

» [Right] *Alpha Mission* is known as *ASO: Armored Scrum Object* in Japan.



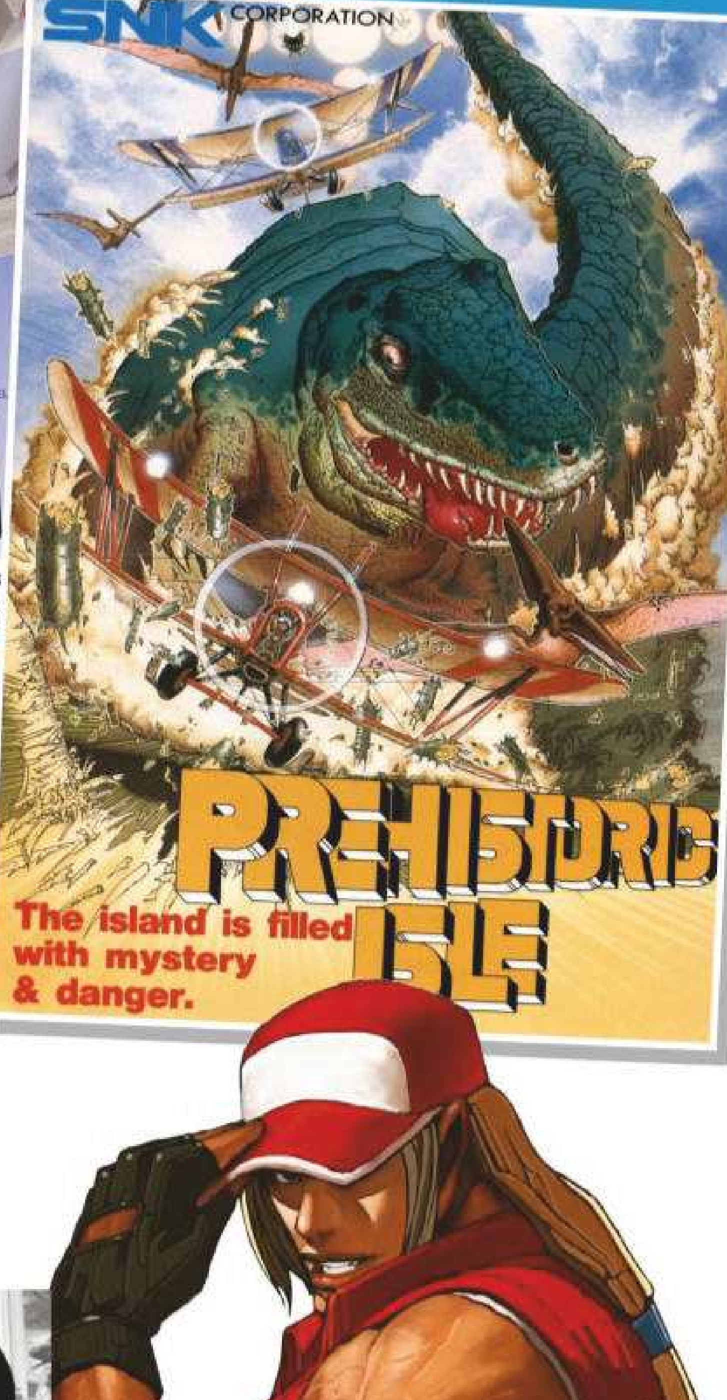
NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR

RELEASE DATE: 1999
FINAL RELEASE: *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters Clash 2 Expand Edition*, 2001
LAUNCH PRICE: ¥8,900 / $69.95 / £59.99
GAMES: 73
NOTES: Backwards compatible with all nine original Neo-Geo Pocket games.



» [Left] An early arcade flyer, showing of SNK's interesting isometric take on Pac-Man, Marvin's Maze.

» [Below] SNK's flyers did a great job at making arcade owners excited about stocking its latest games.



sure when he was working on titles such as *TNK III*, *Ikari Warriors* and *Guerilla War* that the enemy positions as well as the game difficulty will slightly change at every try for endless replayability. He also made sure to add an 'exit way' to every in-game situation that looked unescapable. These difficult games were not just giving frustration to players, but hid also the pleasure to see enemies changing their position and behaviours depending on [how] these games were played."

As it reached its tenth birthday, SNK was in a strong position. The company had just moved into a new headquarters, and 1988 saw the company release more arcade games than any previous year. The momentum continued right through to the end of the Eighties, with plenty of arcade releases including the company's first ever one-on-one fighting game, *Street Smart*. The company was also becoming a more ambitious developer of games for home systems, starting work on the Game Boy with *Dexterity* and finding receptive audiences on the NES with original projects such as *Baseball Stars* and *Crystalis*.

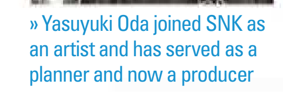
However, it was in 1990 that SNK's arcade division took its next major step into the future. The company introduced a popular lightgun game called *Beast Busters* that year, utilising a unique cabinet with three mounted guns. It's notable not just because of its heritage, but because it marks the end of the pre-Neo-Geo era. The Neo-Geo range kicked off with the MVS arcade board. Games were offered on relatively affordable replaceable cartridges, and boards featured up to six cartridge slots, allowing for owners to add more games without taking up additional floor space. Other companies had previously marketed similar systems, but these had generally been based on home console hardware, which lagged far behind what could be found in arcades. SNK approached the situation from the opposite direction, as the MVS was a thoroughly modern arcade board – and the home console equivalent was, too.



» [Neo-Geo] *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* is considered by many to be one of the finest looking 2D fighting games of all time. It's hard to disagree.

Originally intended for rental use only, the Neo-Geo Advanced Entertainment System was launched in Japan in 1990. This proved so popular that SNK quickly realised that there was a market for a retail release, which followed in 1991 along with launches in other regions. The console was a powerhouse that provided uncompromised arcade games, with massive sprites and voice clips that owners of other consoles could only dream of. That power came at a price, though – the console itself was £400 and the game cartridges cost £150 or more. For comparison, in 1991 £400 could buy you an Amiga with 1MB RAM, ten games and accessories. £150 would have bought you a Mega Drive and a game to play on it. As a result the AES achieved a status as a luxury console, owned only by the most dedicated players. It still worked for SNK, as AES games had a negligible development cost due to using the same code as their arcade counterparts.

While the Neo-Geo AES had a naturally limited market, the Neo-Geo MVS was a big success.



» Yasuyuki Oda joined SNK as an artist and has served as a planner and now a producer

"AT THE TIME IT WASN'T UNCOMMON FOR PEOPLE TO PULL ALL-NIGHTERS. THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMEBODY AT THE OFFICE"

Yasuyuki Oda

Apart from being very convenient and affordable for arcade operators, the system offered a good mix of games. Early titles included such diverse games as *NAM-1975*, *Puzzled*, *King Of The Monsters*, *Magician Lord* and *Super Baseball 2020*. One early hit that proved pivotal was *Fatal Fury*, a fighting game from former *Street Fighter* creator Takashi Nishiyama. Following up on the success of the game and popularity of the genre, SNK started a number of series including *Art Of Fighting*, *Samurai Shodown* and eventually the crossover *King Of Fighters* series, and gained a formidable reputation as a developer of fighting games. These were all successful games that allowed the company to grow rapidly, and as time went on SNK specialised in the genre. "Since I studied animation in school, I thought I'd work in either the games industry or the animation industry," says Yasuyuki Oda, who joined during this period of expansion and worked on many fighting games for SNK until 2000, before returning to the company in 2014. "I'm from Osaka, and in Osaka you've got Konami, Capcom and SNK. I applied to all three in 1993 and was accepted at SNK."

You might be surprised to learn that even working with the Neo-Geo, developers still felt limited by the hardware. "The specs for the system weren't actually that high, so we had to develop tricks to get the games to display as we wanted them to display," says Oda. "For example, to create a weak punch, you'd have three frames of animation, and display them one, two, three, two, one to show the arm coming back. For a heavy punch, you could reuse the first two frames and then finish with a new fourth frame for the hit, then go backwards from three to one as the arm comes back."

Despite the company's growing success, the culture at SNK remained the same, with creators who were passionate about what they made. "There was competition between the teams, but it was a positive kind of rivalry. My favourite game from the other teams was *Samurai Shodown II*." Of course, that meant that the culture of hard work also persisted. "The laws are very different now, but at the time it wasn't uncommon for people to pull all-nighters. There was always somebody at the office," Oda recalls. "There was a time that I was so busy that I was only allowed two hours on Sunday to go home and get clothes for the week. One week, the train fare from Shin-Osaka to the office in Esaka was 160 yen. When I came back, the fare was 180 yen and that was when I was finally able to read that there was a new prime minister."



» [Neo-Geo] Showing off some impressive fiery effects in the enjoyable fantasy platformer *Magician Lord*.

Buoyed by its success and aiming to bring its games to a wider audience, SNK announced the Neo-Geo CD console at the Tokyo Toy Show in June 1994 and released it in September. The theory behind this move made sense. Although CDs were slow to load (especially with the console's single-speed CD-ROM drive), they were cheaper to produce than the smallest Neo-Geo cartridges and offered greater storage capacity then the biggest. A bit more work was required to convert the games but they could be enhanced with CD audio and sold much more cheaply, with prices ranging from 4,800 yen to 7,800 yen. Greater third-party involvement and dedicated home games were also slated for the system, including reports of an updated version of *Crystalis*. With its sights firmly set on mass market success, there was no rental trial for this machine – instead, SNK embarked on a promotional tour of six cities, starting in Hokkaido.

The Neo-Geo CD hardware itself was introduced at a high price because the system required significantly more RAM than its cartridge counterpart, but that didn't stop the system selling out its initial stock of 30,000 on day one. The Neo-Geo CD had over 30 games by the end of 1994, and in 1995 it started to receive games like *Puzzle Bobble* that didn't appear in cartridge form, and received exclusive developments such as *Crossed Swords 2*. However, these were thin on the ground and the flagship game *Samurai Shodown RPG* was heavily delayed. What's more, the Saturn and PlayStation both launched within a few months of the Neo-Geo CD's introduction, and both consoles were cheaper and capable of displaying

» [Above] *Ikari Warriors* was on of SNK's first big surprise hits in the west.



» [Right] It might look superficially similar, but *The Last Blade* is very different to the *Samurai Shodown* series.

SNK'S STARS

SNK has produced some iconic characters over the years. How many of these do you recognise?

TERRY BOGARD

■ Whether he's wearing his iconic red jacket or his stylish *Mark Of The Wolves* outfit, the 'hungry wolf' is SNK's most noteworthy hero. He originally pursues revenge against Geese Howard, and later becomes an adoptive father to Rock Howard.

MAI SHIRANUI

■ Introduced in *Fatal Fury 2*, Mai is one of SNK's most popular fighters. She's smitten with Andy Bogard, who trained with her family, and she's recently cameoed in *Dead Or Alive 5: Last Round*.

GEESE HOWARD

■ The most recognisable villain in the SNK universe is emblematic of difficult fighting game bosses. Despite his propensity for falling off of tall buildings, he's a constant thorn in Terry's side and even makes a cameo appearance in *Tekken 7*.

HAOHMARU

■ This swordsman is the most recognisable character of the *Samurai Shodown* series, and is a lover of food and sake. He has a deadly rivalry with his former training partner Genjuro Kibagami.

NAKORURU

■ A reluctant fighter who is dedicated to her mission of protecting nature. Though her weapon has a short range, Nakoruru is fast and has the assistance of her hawk Mamahaha or her wolf Shikuru.

AMAKUSA

■ A vengeful spirit resurrected by the malevolent god Ambrosia. Amakusa's goal is to bring Ambrosia into the mortal realm.

MARCO ROSSI

■ The combat leader of PF Squad, the heroic faction of the *Metal Slug* games. His resignation was denied after the events of the first game, and surprisingly he's also a talented programmer.

TARMA ROVING

■ A member of the PF Squad and a friend of Marco's, Tarma is less serious than his comrade. He had intended to set up a motorbike shop after Morden was defeated, but his superiors coaxed him back into service.

GENERAL DONALD MORDEN

■ The main antagonist of the *Metal Slug* series, he was driven to insanity after his son was killed in a bombing, and joined the rebel army. Morden has been known to make odd alliances, including teaming up with Martians.

G-MANTLE

■ This masked fellow is an oddity – though he's never been the star of his own game, he was frequently seen in early Neo-Geo advertising and has cameos in games such as *The King Of Fighters 2000* and *Card Fighters Clash*.

NEO POKE-KUN

■ A Neo-Geo Pocket mascot and the star of *Ganbare Neo Poke-Kun!*, a game in which Neo Poke-Kun lives in your console and makes minigames. He also cameos with Yuki in *Neogeo Battle Coliseum*.

ATHENA

■ A princess who lands in the Fantasy World as a result of boredom and curiosity. Her descendant Athena Asamiya is in *Psycho Soldier*, and she's a secret boss in *SNK vs Capcom: SVC Chaos*.

KYO KUSANAGI

■ Introduced as the face of *The King Of Fighters '94*, Kyo is a student who has the ability to create flames, which makes him a devastating fighter – and a target for organisations which wish to clone or kill him.

IORI YAGAMI

■ Introduced in *The King Of Fighters '95* and quickly became popular. He bears a personal grudge against Kyo, and his purple flames are caused by the curse of the evil Orochi.

RUGAL BERNSTEIN

■ A ruthless arms dealer and the organiser of the *King Of Fighters* tournaments in 1994 and 1995, this villain likes to preserve the bodies of foes in liquid metal as statues. He was created to be the ultimate boss, and he's tough as nails.

RYO SAKAZAKI

■ *Art Of Fighting* introduced us to this serious karate practitioner, as he searched for his kidnapped sister Yuri. His dojo is always looking for recruits, and he's got a bit of an eye for his former foe King.

ROBERT GARCIA

■ Another Kyokugen karate user, Robert joins his best friend Ryo in the search for Yuri. He's hot-headed and wealthy, unlike Ryo, and despite being from Italy he speaks Japanese with the Kansai dialect, which is commonly associated with comedians.

MR KARATE

■ A fearsome fighter wearing a Tengu mask, and the final boss of *Art Of Fighting*. He's later revealed as Takuma Sakazaki, a karate dojo owner working for Geese Howard because of threats against his children Ryo and Yuri.

DESIGNER PIXELS

Hiroko Yokoyama explains the graphical development of some of SNK's most recognisable games

How much support did you have from the *Ikari Warriors* arcade team when working on the MSX2 version?
Mr Oba [Koji Obata], who was the main leader of the team in charge of the arcade version of *Ikari Warriors*, helped us a lot when porting the game to MSX2. He shared with us the dot pixel data of the original game. Unfortunately, the map data was missing, and we had a lot of trouble because of this.

What sort of materials did you use for reference and inspiration when working on *Guevara (Guerrilla War)*?
There were almost no books about Che Guevara in Osaka in 1987. I had to go to one of the biggest book stores in Osaka, where I finally found three books about Che Guevara's life. There was also very little documentation about Cuba at that time, but I found a few pages about this country and its streets in a magazine for men. It was way after I thought I should have searched in secondhand bookstores for books about Che Guevara that were published in Japan in Sixties and already out of print.

***Crystalis* had a fantasy theme, unlike the military games you worked on beforehand. How did you come up with the character designs for this game?**
The development of the game had already started when I was involved in this game, and I was told by the original team members that I could draw freely, as long as the main character had red hair and was wearing blue armour. I used manga and anime that were popular in Japan at that time for my reference, and proposed to the planners three variations of Mesia. After being informed on the details of the Four Sages, I started working on their design. I also made sure to draw Athena and Kensou as adult versions of Psycho Soldiers. I drew monsters in dot pixels, but also some imagined from the game settings and atmosphere. After the planners chose and approved the design of the Four Sages, I polished and added details to these characters until their final design get approved.



» [Arcade] SNK is known for its stellar sprite art, and that's been a fact since its early games like *Guerrilla War*.



» [Neo Geo Pocket] SNK's first portable console didn't last long before it was given a colour upgrade.

3D graphics. SNK introduced the Neo-Geo CDZ in December 1995, which delivered faster loading times, but it couldn't halt the format's decline – there were fewer games released in the Neo-Geo CD's last four years than its first four months.

Even as early as the mid-Nineties, the original Neo-Geo hardware seemed to be nearing the end of its natural life as a flagship product. Still, SNK made advances in other areas, as the company launched a chain of Neo-Geo Land arcade locations. The first Neo-Geo World was launched in Tsukuba in December 1995, offering a variety of attractions including simulator rides, bowling, karaoke rooms, restaurants and plenty of arcade games. In 1996, the Neo Print amusement photo booth was introduced, which allowed users to decorate their photos and print them to stickers. The company also began to develop games for other platforms again, beginning with Neo-Geo conversions for the PlayStation and Saturn in 1996.

SNK had plenty of reasons to think that the future would be bright. In order to prepare for that future, a number of changes were made in 1997. Neo-Geo AES and CD consoles were discontinued, though game production would continue as the MVS continued to receive support. In the home, SNK would continue to produce arcade conversions, but also original projects for the PlayStation. For arcades, SNK launched an MVS successor: the 3D-capable Hyper Neo-Geo 64, with the driving game *Road's Edge* as its debut release.

"I WASN'T A BIG FAN OF THE HYPER NEO-GEO 64. I WOULD'VE PREFERRED TO WORK ON THE PLAYSTATION"
Yasuyuki Oda

Unfortunately for SNK, that bright future was a false dawn. Part of the problem was that the Hyper Neo-Geo 64 failed to succeed the Neo-Geo MVS. One key reason for this was that it sacrificed one of the key selling points of its older hardware. The arcade market was shifting away from games with joysticks and buttons, towards dedicated driving and lightgun cabinets. The Hyper Neo-Geo 64 had to support them, and it did. But the beauty of the MVS was that it was a universal platform, and Hyper Neo-Geo 64 boards weren't – hardware designed to play driving games wouldn't play the fighting games, for example.

However, there were bigger problems than that. "I wasn't a big fan of the Hyper Neo-Geo 64. I would've preferred to work on the PlayStation, it had better specs," says Oda. However, the board wasn't just underpowered – its 3D interpretations of *Samurai Shodown* and *Fatal Fury* failed to achieve the same acclaim as the 2D originals. "This is just my opinion, this isn't an official line from the company, but the people who worked on the Hyper Neo-Geo 64 weren't the same people who worked on the original Neo-Geo. I think that was the main problem." Hyper Neo-Geo 64 game production never overtook MVS production, and the board saw its final release less than two years after its debut. This left SNK in an awkward situation, reliant on the aged MVS hardware, and without the resources to attempt a second successor.

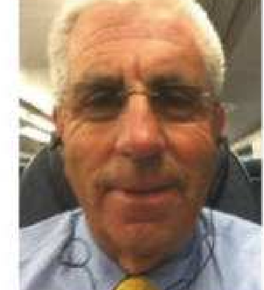
One area in which SNK could still leverage its expertise in creating 2D games was the handheld market, and it developed the Neo-Geo Pocket for introduction in 1998. However, the console, a black



» [Neo-Geo Pocket Color] It doesn't have a vast library of games, but the NGPC does have some cracking titles.

and white handheld, launched just as Nintendo finally moved the Game Boy line into colour. Early sales were brisk, but the console would never leave Japan – the rest of the world would receive its successor. "In 1998 I met with John Barone who showed me a prototype of the Neo-Geo Pocket Color," says Ben Herman, who joined SNK America in 1999 as vice president of sales and marketing. "The opportunity to set up sales and to sell the product with its great titles was too great of an opportunity to pass up. And a salary too!"

The Neo-Geo Pocket Color was a serious attempt to gain a foothold in the market, with wide distribution and visible marketing. When the console arrived in 1999, it was cheaper than the Game Boy Color, offered better visuals and similar battery life. Versions of its arcade classics including *King Of Fighters*, *Metal Slug* and *Samurai Shodown* were all made available within the first year. What's more, SNK established partnerships to bring *Pac-Man*, *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Puzzle Bobble* to the platform, although it did have to develop some of these internally. By E3 2000, the Neo-Geo Pocket Color had claimed a two per cent share of the North American handheld market – a small percentage, but it represented an audience that was able to make the operation profitable. "With third-party support, we could have hit three per cent in three years. It's all about the games," says Ben.


» Ben Herman spent two spells at SNK in the USA between 1999 and 2008

That opportunity would never come, as SNK was in trouble. In January 2000, pachinko manufacturer Aruze purchased SNK and absorbed it as a subsidiary. By April, the company employed 185 fewer people than it had a year prior, and in June the company withdrew the Neo-Geo Pocket Color from non-Japanese markets. Boxes and manuals were pulped, and cartridges were intended for reuse in the Japanese market. This wouldn't come to pass and most stock wound up back in the wild via liquidation.

SNK enjoyed a high profile in 2000 thanks to its crossover projects with Capcom, which saw both companies produce great games. But as its characters fought for supremacy in fighting games and trading card games, SNK was fighting to survive. "Aruze bankrupted SNK," opines Ben, and it's certainly true that the company went into rapid decline under its ownership. Arcade game production diminished to the point that *The King Of Fighters 2001* was contracted out to external developers, and in Japan the Neo-Geo Pocket Color turned into an outlet for Aruze-branded pachislot games. In October 2001, SNK went bankrupt. However, the SNK story was far from over.

"Playmore was a brilliant move. SNK overcame the bankruptcy situation in court," says Ben. SNK founder Eikichi Kawasaki had seen the bankruptcy coming, and established a holding company in August 2001. The first step to overcoming the collapse of the original company was purchasing SNK's properties, allowing the company to resume production of Neo-Geo arcade games. These still had to be developed externally – Playmore worked ▶



» [Arcade] *Samurai Shodown VI* was one of several games that SNK released on Atomiswave hardware.

NEO-GEO WORLD TOUR

A guide to global SNK hotspots



01 OSAKA, JAPAN

■ The home city of SNK, and a frequent background location in the *King Of Fighters* series. The company has had a number of offices in the area over the years.

02 TSUKUBA, JAPAN

■ The first Neo-Geo World location was opened here in December 1995. This indoor theme park offered a variety of attractions including Q-Zar laser tag, Drift King cart racing and a horror attraction called The Walk. Additionally, you could enjoy a game of bowling, karaoke, games and a variety of cafes, and there was even a Tsutaya video rental shop.

03 TOKYO, JAPAN

■ The second Neo-Geo World opened here in March 1999. The rides at this indoor theme park included the car chase simulation New York Getaway, the shooting adventure Agent Metal and a hostage rescue walking attraction called No Fate. The company has also had local offices here at various points in time.

04 TORRANCE, CA, USA

■ SNK's first American office opened here on Kashiwa Street in the early Eighties. The company moved back to an office on Earl Street in the early Nineties.

05 SUNNYVALE, CA, USA

■ When SNK formally established its American subsidiary in 1986, its first office was in Sobrante Way.

06 SAN JOSE, CA, USA

■ SNK returned to the Bay Area in 1997, relocating to Great Oaks Boulevard in San Jose.

07 CYPRESS, CA, USA

■ SNK NeoGeo USA Corporation, the arcade distribution arm of SNK in the late MVS years, was located here.

08 WALL, NJ, USA

■ SNK operated out of a very small office during the Playmore years. Established in 2003, this was far from SNK's traditional California locations.

09 KOWLOON, HONG KONG

■ 1992 saw the establishment of SNK Asia, which kept the same offices up until the branch was dissolved following SNK's bankruptcy. SNK Asia was re-established here in 2015.

10 SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

■ SNK's first branch in South America was established in 1993, and the MVS was very popular here. Some of the Neo-Geo World locations it opened still exist, albeit under different companies.

11 LONDON, UK

■ SNK Europe was established here in 1994, initially occupying an office in Albemarle Street before moving to Regent's Park Road in Finchley in 1996.

12 SINGAPORE
13 DUBAI, UAE

■ Other offices including SNK Singapore and SNK Middle East operated from these locations, but both subsidiaries were closed by 1999.

14 OSAKA, JAPAN
15 NAGAKUTE, JAPAN
16 NARA, JAPAN
17 KATO, JAPAN

■ These cities all hosted Neo-Geo Land arcades. These typically offered a mixture of games, karaoke and pool, although smaller locations had fewer offerings. SNK held events at these arcades, the most popular of which were the location tests of new arcade games. Osaka was lucky enough to have two, one of which remained open under Sun Amusements until 2004 – you can see it in the background of *King Of Fighters* games often.

18 YOKOHAMA, JAPAN
19 CHIBA, JAPAN
20 FUKUI, JAPAN
21 NATORI, JAPAN
22 FUKUOKA, JAPAN

■ Each of these cities had a Neo-Geo Bowl facility, offering bowling, games, karaoke, pool and cafe facilities. Sun Amusements kept the large out-of-town facilities in Chiba and Natori running for a few years after SNK's 2001 bankruptcy.



"I HAD MORE AUTHORITY TO MAKE SNK STRONG AGAIN IN THE USA"

Ben Herman



» [Dreamcast] *Cool Cool Tune* was a sequel to the Neo-Geo Pocket's *Cool Cool Jam*.

with Eolith on *The King Of Fighters 2002* and had Mega Enterprise develop *Metal Slug 4*. But in 2003, Playmore was able to sue Aruze. The former SNK owner continued to use the SNK properties in spite of the rights having been sold. Playmore won the case and was awarded 5.64 billion yen in damages.

With its security assured by this judgement, Playmore pressed ahead with a full-on revival by regaining the rights to the SNK name and rebranding as SNK Playmore. "I received a phone call and was asked to come to SNK HQ in Osaka. I did not know why and was offered the position as President to reopen USA HQ. It was an honour.," recalls Ben. "I had more authority to make SNK strong again in the USA." The American operation at this time was based in Wall, New Jersey and had a tiny staff of just five people. How does a company run with so few people? "I outsourced everything from warehousing to sales reps, which was very efficient," replies Ben.

» The Neo-Geo Mini has just been released and features 40 classic games. Look out for a review in a future issue.

Unfortunately good things can't last forever, and Neo-Geo game production was discontinued in 2004 with the release of *Samurai Shodown V Special*. "What kept it alive was the fans," says Oda. "But there were a lot of Chinese copies of the cartridges, that ended up hurting the system." If you want to know how SNK Playmore felt about that, the plot for 2005's *NeoGeo Battle Coliseum* concerns an evil corporation called WAREZ with the ability to clone powerful fighters. New arcade game development moved to the Dreamcast-based Atomiswave platform, and the company also entered the lucrative pachislot market with a *Metal Slug* machine in 2004.

In the home market, the company continued to convert its arcade games to consoles, although it occasionally ran into problems – in particular with Sony, which wouldn't approve certain games for standalone release in the North American market. "We did combo packs for PS2 to overcome that," remembers Ben, although some games couldn't be combined – most notably *SNK vs Capcom: SVC Chaos*. Ben also remembers problems with the competition. "Xbox was a headache as mid-stream Microsoft started 360 while we were developing for Xbox," he says. The company also experimented with 3D versions of *Metal Slug* and *The King Of Fighters* on the PS2, and published the mobile dating sim series *Days Of*

IN AND OUT

SNK has absorbed a number of companies over the years, others have split off from it, and some even went full circle

IN ADK



■ Alpha Denshi was a prolific developer for all SNK hardware, producing games such as *Twinkle Star Sprites*, *Beast Busters: Second Nightmare* and *Crush Roller*. The company closed in 2003 and its properties were bought by SNK.

IN NAZCA CORPORATION



■ This group of former Irem staff only had its logo on two games – but those two were *Neo Turf Masters* and *Metal Slug*, two of the very best Neo-Geo games. SNK wisely folded the team into its own ranks before long.

OUT & IN BREZZASOFT



■ Formed during SNK's troubles in 2000, Brezzasoft launched its own cartridge-based arcade board and was credited on games including *The King Of Fighters 2001*. It was purchased by Playmore not long after formation in 2002.

OUT & IN SUN AMUSEMENT



■ This company took over Neo-Geo Land and Bowl operations following SNK's 2001 bankruptcy, as well as distribution of Neo-Geo MVS and AES games. It was purchased by Playmore in 2003.

OUT DIMPS

■ Takashi Nishiyama and Hiroshi Matsumoto formed this company in the run-up to SNK's 2001 bankruptcy. It has been a prolific developer, working on games including the *Sonic Advance* series and *Street Fighter V*.

OUT NOISE FACTORY



■ Former SNK and Atlus designer Keiko Ijuu founded this developer, which worked closely with SNK for many years on games including *Sengoku 3*, *Metal Slug* games from *Metal Slug 4* onwards and *The King Of Fighters Neowave*.



» [PS4] *King Of Fighters XIV* is an impressive return to form and features nearly 60 playable characters.

> "A LOT OF KIDS PLAYED THESE GAMES AT RELEASE, AND MAY STILL HAVE MEMORIES ABOUT THEM SOMEWHERE IN THEIR HEART"
> Hiroko Yokoyama



» [DS] *Metal Slug* continues to be a strong franchise for SNK that's appeared throughout its history.

▶ *Memories* featuring its popular characters. As the generation continued, the company found success in publishing retro-focused compilations on the PlayStation 2, PSP and Wii.

The next generation proved to be difficult. Though digital distribution enabled SNK Playmore to distribute its back catalogue, the high costs of developing packaged games meant that few were released, and those were usually arcade conversions. Even this was a struggle, as *Samurai Shodown Sen* was poorly received on Xbox 360 and *The King Of Fighters XII* was beautiful but limited in content. Original titles were instead created for the Nintendo DS, including *SNK Vs Capcom: Card Fighters Clash DS* and *Metal Slug 7*. *The King Of Fighters XIII* released in 2010 and would become the company's final original game to launch in arcades first (though it remains active in the market today). It was ported to PS3 and Xbox 360 in 2011.

What followed was a period where SNK focused on pachislot machines and mobile games. That changed in 2015, though. "For quite a while the company had invested itself into pachislot," explains Oda. "The laws changed and it became much more difficult to thrive in this market space, so the leadership decided they wanted to return to console game manufacturing, which is what allowed me and a lot of other former staff to come back." The majority shareholding in SNK Playmore was also acquired by Ledo Millennium for $63.5 million in August of that year.

The first major project under SNK's new focus on games was *The King Of Fighters XIV*, released in 2016. The game shows SNK's current approach to game development – it's for home platforms first, and the first in the main *King Of Fighters* series to go 3D. Both changes have required some adjustment for Oda. "One of the biggest differences is that the volume per game for consoles is much greater. You've got a bunch of different modes that you have to worry about, plus the options menu and things like that," he explains. However, there are some advantages. "Because you don't have to worry about getting players to put in another 100 yen, you can actually lower the difficulty level a bit." Given his animation background, the change of graphical technology has also been a challenge for Oda. "The cool thing about 2D is that



depending on how good your artist is, you only need to draw the cool stuff. The way 3D works is that everything has to be rendered. The hard thing with 3D is how you hide the parts that don't necessarily look as cool." The game has been positively received and was followed by *SNK Heroines: Tag Team Frenzy*.

Today, SNK is celebrating its heritage with a number of projects. Its early years are being celebrated in *SNK 40th Anniversary Collection* for Nintendo Switch, and a dedicated mini console has been created for fans of the Neo-Geo era. But what is it about the company and its games that keeps players' interest? "Games made before the Neo-Geo were created at a time where there were plenty of technical restrictions, which led game creators to think a lot about how to make enjoyable games," says Yokoyama. "A lot of kids played these games at release, and may still have memories about them somewhere in their heart." For Yoshino, it's also nostalgia. "I'd say that players probably now over their forties will enjoy games such as *ASO*, *Athena* and *Ikari Warriors* the same way they did when they first played these games three decades ago," he says. Ben agrees, citing "Great retro products, great IPs and great gameplay."

But for Oda, who has the chance to shape SNK's future, we're wondering which parts of its past might be part of his plans. If he could bring some old series back, which ones would he choose? "One is *Ikari Warriors*, and the other is *Athena*," he answers. "But this is just what I'd like to do! These were games that came out when I was in middle school and high school, and I played them a lot." Best not start the rumour mill turning, then: these are not concrete plans. However, the company has announced the return of *Samurai Shodown* for 2019, so it's clear that SNK's past is still a big part of its future.

SNK is many things to many people. Some will associate it with the rotary joysticks of the *Ikari Warriors* era, while others can't think of the company without picturing its sprite art or expensive cartridges. None of these are things that SNK does today, yet the company retains a distinct identity – when you look at Terry Bogard, you know he's the *Fatal Fury* protagonist. When you see that the Neo-Geo Mini replicates an arcade cabinet rather than a console, it's easy to see the spirit of a company that didn't have to produce £150 cartridge games, but did so because it could. And that's why we hope to see SNK celebrate many more birthdays – ultimately, there's not another company like it.

» [Switch] The latest brawler from SNK features an all-female cast.

FEARSOME FEMALES

Producer Yasuyuki Oda discusses the design of SNK's latest fighting game, SNK Heroines: Tag Team Frenzy

How did the *SNK Heroines* project get started?
Soon after *The King Of Fighters XIV* was released, we decided to start with a new project with popular female characters from throughout the whole SNK library. That's where this came from.

There was a game on the Neo-Geo Pocket Color with a similar theme, *SNK Gals' Fighters*. Was any inspiration drawn from that for this concept?
Actually, it was kind of an opposite influence. Because we had already made a game like that, we wanted to make sure *SNK Heroines* wasn't just a rehash of what that was, but a complete differentiation and a new game within that concept of using female fighters.

How did the team decide which characters to include in the game?
There were three different categories – popular characters from SNK, characters that we want to make more popular, and what we call the 'special box'.

We're curious, what does the 'special box' entail?
If you've played *The King Of Fighters XIV*, you might know that everyone gets revived at the end of the story. So it was kind of a way to bring back Shermie.

The concept of a tag-team fighting game is familiar to most players, but the Dream Finish system is a new concept. Could you please explain a bit about that for us?
The only way you can win is with a Dream Finish, so even if you get your opponent's energy meter all the way down to zero, that opponent will not be defeated until you use a Dream Finish. The reason that this is important is because rather than a traditional fighting game where you're using many combos or trying to chain things together, it's for people who maybe are not particularly great at that. It's more of a timing thing – waiting to build up your Dream Finish, and then waiting to get your enemy down to low energy, and then unleashing it at the right moment. Or maybe your playable character has used all of their stamina gauge, and so you switch out to your character in reserve who has the Dream Finish, and do it right then.

You mentioned that the Dream Finish system was tailored towards gamers who aren't so good at pulling off combos. Is it fair to say that you're aiming *SNK Heroines* towards an audience that is less familiar with fighting games?
Yes, the idea is to be as broad as possible with who is able to play this game. Of course there's practice involved, you still have to practice and learn how to play the game well, but it's very welcoming for everyone.

***King Of Fighters XIV* had features to help newcomers, such as autocombos, and *SNK Heroines* is geared towards players who are new to fighting games. How important is it to get new players invested in the genre?**
We still plan on making games for the more hardcore audience, but especially at demo events or games shows, most people are just going to grab the controller and start pounding the buttons. Being able to have something cool happen when they do that is pretty important to keeping them interested in the game overall, so that's part of our strategy to increase the amount of fans.

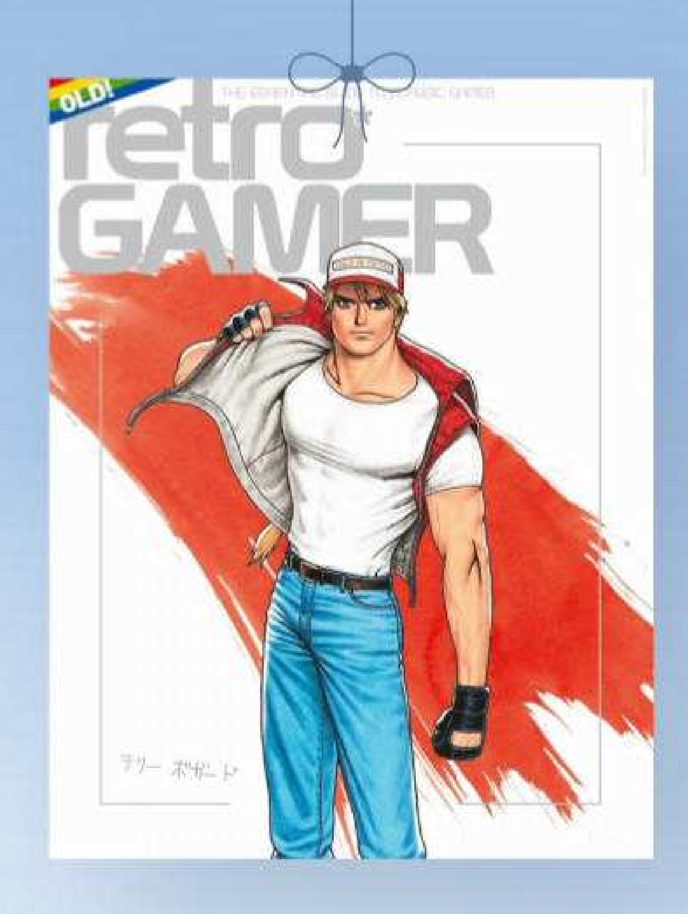
What modes are included?
Story mode, versus mode, survival mode, training mode, online mode – and there's an option within the online mode to watch other players and bet points on their battles.

What is the purpose of the points that you accrue?
Those are used for customisation – there's lots of costumes, lots of accessories, you can buy different backgrounds and take screenshots using them. The in-game currency is the way to get all this stuff, the betting is just a quick way to get it so you can unlock more things that you'd like to use.

SNK has been giving ongoing support to its competitive games. Is that something you plan to do with *SNK Heroines*?
In addition to the Neo-Geo World Tour, we also offer support to esports communities, and we plan to continue doing that with *SNK Heroines* as well as *The King Of Fighters XIV*.



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RESTORING THE PAST

SNK was lighting up arcades long before its Neo-Geo hardware came along. Brandon Sheffield and Frank Cifaldi explain why those early games are crucial, and how they're preserving them with the SNK 40th Anniversary Collection

Words by Darran Jones





» [Arcade] *Athena* is one of SNK's earliest success stories in the west and was converted to several systems, including the NES.

If the recent closure of high-profile ROM sites like Emuparadise has taught us one thing it's the importance of having access to classic games that you can legally own and play as the developers originally intended. Of course, preserving games in the form of compilations is certainly nothing new, but developers have really been upping the stakes in recent years. Compilations like *Rare Replay*, *Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection* and *Mega Man Legacy Collection* are as much about the heritage surrounding the franchises as the games themselves. No company knows this better than Digital Eclipse, and it's been working its own special brand of restoration magic for years and most recently wowed us with the aforementioned (and 91% scoring) *Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection*.

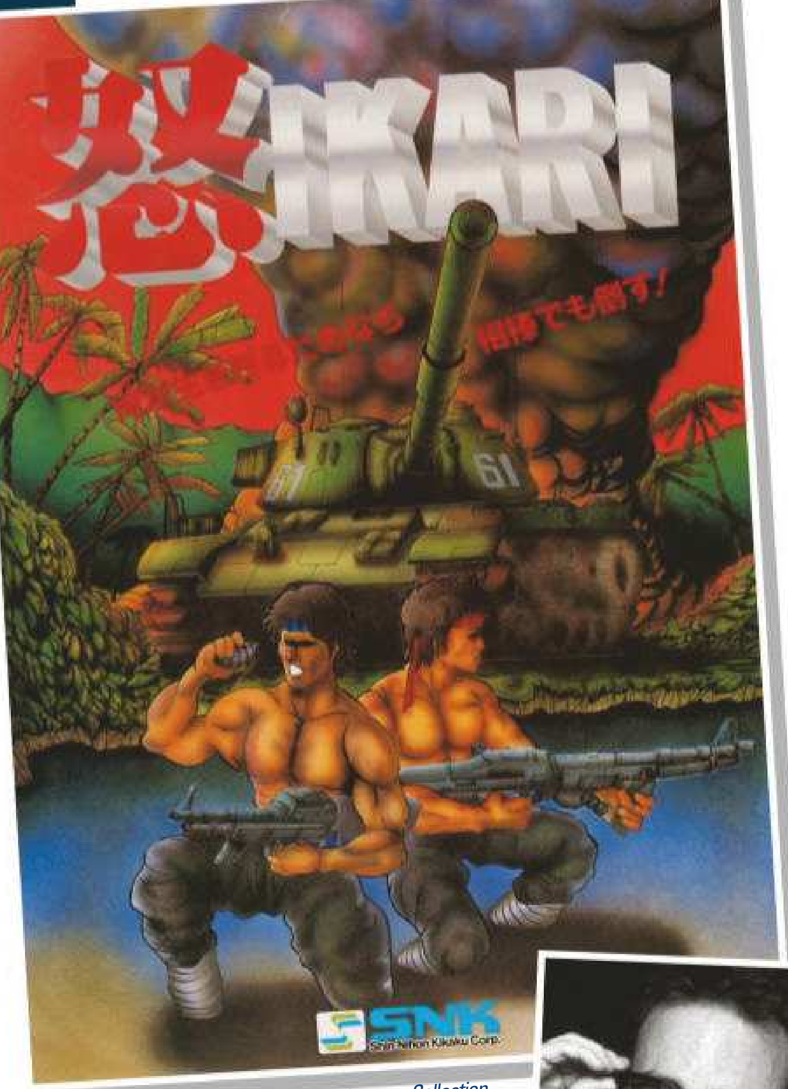
Digital Eclipse has now turned its attention to the early arcade and NES games of SNK in the form of a brand-new compilation, the *SNK 40th Anniversary Collection*. Exclusive to Switch and designed to show off those halcyon days when the company was first finding its feet, it features an eclectic range of games and according to Frank Cifaldi, has been in the works for some time. "SNK and Digital Eclipse have been wanting to work on something together for years, but we could never connect the dots before now," he says. "I think this specific project needed a historian's touch, which is what we excel at." He has a point. Nowadays, there's so much focus on SNK's Neo-Geo that it's easy to forget it's the same developer that delivered arcade thrills in the form of *Ikari Warriors*, *Prehistoric Isle In 1930*, *Athena* and countless other games, which meant Frank, who works as head of restoration, knew he and his team has a unique opportunity. "Every SNK fan knows those later games, but they don't really know much about what came before them," he says. "For us it was a dream project: it's easy to sell people on *Mega Man* or *Street Fighter*, but we wanted to prove that there's an audience for lesser-known titles if they're treated with care and respect. I think people who are into older videogames are willing to go exploring for hidden gems, and it's so rare that a game compilation encourages that."

Brandon Sheffield, who is involved with the project in a writing capacity, is also keen to point out that it highlights an important slice of SNK history, which is often overlooked due to the popularity of its later home consoles. "This collection shows where SNK came from, before the hardware was standardised, when the company was still finding itself," he explains. "There are great games in here that have very rarely been played, but they're very much a part of the evolution of the company, and very fun to play in their own right. It was also really important to us to give developers like Yokoyama-san and Yoshino-san their due. Whenever people talk about SNK, they talk about the Neo-Geo. But this collection highlights the innovations of the staff of that time, when each new arcade board was made from scratch, to meet the specs of a specific game or series. Those wild and free days are what we are celebrating here. On top of that, there are games in this collection that have never been properly emulated before, and thus weren't even playable in their correct form until now. Even if they were on prior collections."

At the time of going to press, 18 games have been announced, which range from early releases like *Fantasy* and *Vanguard*, to the popular *Ikari Warriors* series. ▶



» [Switch] Blasting dinosaurs in the excellent *Prehistoric Isle In 1930*. What's not to love?



» The Museum mode of *SNK 40th Anniversary Collection* features plenty of classic art for games like *Ikari Warriors*.

» Frank Cifaldi is Digital Eclipse's head of restoration and is immensely proud of its work.

THE ULTIMATE MUSEUM



One of the most impressive aspects of *Mega Man Legacy Collection*, *Rare Replay* and *Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection* are their extensive 'museum' modes which are bursting with information about the featured games. *SNK 40th Anniversary Collection* will be no different, with Digital Eclipse collating a huge amount of information about the featured games and SNK's history. "It's about as comprehensive as we could get it within the constraints I mentioned – the games had to be developed and published by SNK," reveals Brandon. "We don't have all the games playable, but they're more or less all discussed, with flyers, screens, info, stories, and more."

As more and more modern gamers begin looking to the past, companies are realising that it's no longer acceptable to release bare-bones collections that feature a bunch of ROMs and poorly sourced artwork, and we appear to be entering an exciting new age for compilations. "This is the most comprehensive look at pre-Neo-Geo SNK that has ever been published," continues Frank. "This is the first time a complete list of developed titles has ever been made in English, and we solved several mysteries that nobody else has in terms of the company's history. My goal with all of our projects at Digital Eclipse is that people buy them for the bonus content. One of the nicest compliments I ever got about *Street Fighter 30th Anniversary Collection* was from someone who told me that they played the game for hours and loved it, but they haven't actually played the games yet. That's exactly what I want! To me, the games themselves are the bonus features, I want to create a brand-new audience of people who buy our interactive history lessons just to learn and celebrate.





WATCH AND LEARN



A unique inclusion for Digital Eclipse's compilation is called Watch. It's a innovative new idea that features complete playthroughs by Frank of every single game on the collection, from *Athena* to *Prehistoric Isle*. It's a useful prerecorded tool-assisted run that allows you to get a feel for certain parts of the game if you're struggling with your own run. You can pause, fast-forward and skip through any sections you want, but by far the most impressive aspect of Watch is that you can literally drop into any game at any point, allowing you to play the game yourself. It's a wonderfully clever idea that according to the team was very difficult to implement. "The 'video' is in fact a ROM playback," explains Brandon about the team's innovative feature. "It's actually emulating Frank's playthrough. No other collection has this feature." Here's hoping we see similar things like this in the future.

» [Arcade] SNK's compilation is out shortly. Expect a review in our next issue.

Interestingly, in addition to arcade originals, the collection also features a number of NES conversions, including the acclaimed RPG, *Crystalis*. "Something unique about SNK is that *every* home version offered something unique that was not in the arcade original," continues Frank. "Plus, a lot of these ports were made in-house at SNK, sometimes by the same people who made the arcade games. This collection is a snapshot of SNK as it was in the Eighties, I like to call it an 'interactive art book.' That snapshot would not be complete without the home versions."

If choosing to focus on the pre-Neo-Geo games was a relatively straightforward decision for Digital Eclipse to make, collating the assets that were needed was a lot more difficult as Brandon reveals. "SNK doesn't have a lot of the original boards, and it's tough for them to get interviews and the like, because reaching out to past employees can be a bit of a faux pas for Japanese companies. So we took a lot of it on ourselves. Frank sourced dozens of arcade flyers, cleaned up logos and fuzzy screenshots, and bought arcade boards to test them against existing ROMs to ensure they were correct. As for myself, I found and interviewed several former SNK employees, which is easier for me to do as a third party, versus SNK doing it themselves." Equally useful from Digital Eclipse's viewpoint was being able draw on the experience of those employees. "It was such a relief," says Frank, "as some Japanese companies won't acknowledge past employees. Because of that we were able to get a lot of insight that we could never possibly get otherwise."

We've long told stories in **Retro Gamer** about how source code can go missing or get destroyed, so it's unsurprising to hear that Digital Eclipse faced similar issues while collating its selection of games. What *is* surprising are the sheer lengths that the team went to in order to secure the titles it wanted. "I took a seven-hour bus and train ride through rural Japan to a shop in the middle of nowhere that rents out arcade boards," reveals Brandon. "This was the only known location of *Space Micom*, one of SNK's very first games. I managed to play it, confirm a massive amount of info (it has a CPU, prior to this we didn't think it did), and gather intel about a number of other undumped SNK titles. That relationship is ongoing, so no promises, but anything that comes out of that will be quite exciting for the preservation of SNK's history."

» Brandon Sheffield went to great lengths to ensure SNK's history is as accurate as possible

» [Arcade] You won't find the Mega Drive version of *Ikari III* here due to the licence being owned by Takara.



Of course, tracking down games is only part of the problem, you also need to faithfully emulate them and ensure they work in a way that's acceptable for modern gamers. It was a challenge for Frank and his team, partly because of SNK's love for a certain type of joystick that was popular at the time. "The biggest challenge has been dealing with the Loop Lever games," explains Frank. "The Loop Lever was this weird joystick used in several games, including *Ikari Warriors*. It was basically a joystick that you could twist: you'd tilt to move, like a regular joystick, but you'd twist it around 360-degrees to aim your gun. I don't know about yours, but my Switch didn't come with a Loop Lever, so we had to figure out how to make these games play right and feel good using stock hardware. What we ended up doing – and this was not easy – was forcing the games to play like 'twin-stick' shooters. When SNK re-released these games in the past, the best they could do was map buttons to 'rotate clockwise' and 'rotate



“I took a seven-hour bus and train ride through rural Japan to a shop in the middle of nowhere that rents out arcade boards”
Brandon Sheffield

» [Arcade] *Psycho Soldier* is the second game to feature *Athena* and includes a track sung by Japanese pop idol, Kaori Shimizu.

counterclockwise,’ which to me does not replicate the arcade experience at all. In the arcade, if you were good, you could turn quickly in any direction you wanted to just with muscle memory, which is impossible if you’re waiting for your character to rotate where you need him to on screen. Technically ‘twin-sticking’ these games is making them a little easier than they ever were, so it was a tough decision to make, but we believe this is the best way to preserve the intended feeling of playing the actual games in the arcade.”

While Digital Eclipse wants the games to look, play and feel as accurate as possible. It’s also keen on ensuring its collection becomes the definitive word on SNK’s early history, a difficulty Brandon is only too aware of as he’s collated the information, developer diaries and trivia about the available games. “I did as much work and research as possible to ensure the information was accurate,” he admits. “It’s tough, because once this game comes out, whatever I have written becomes the truth, if you know what I mean. This is the official SNK standpoint once it comes out. But we’re relying on old documents, old memories, old interviews. None of that is perfect, and when I had two pieces of conflicting info from two different developer testimonials, I had to do extra research to figure out who



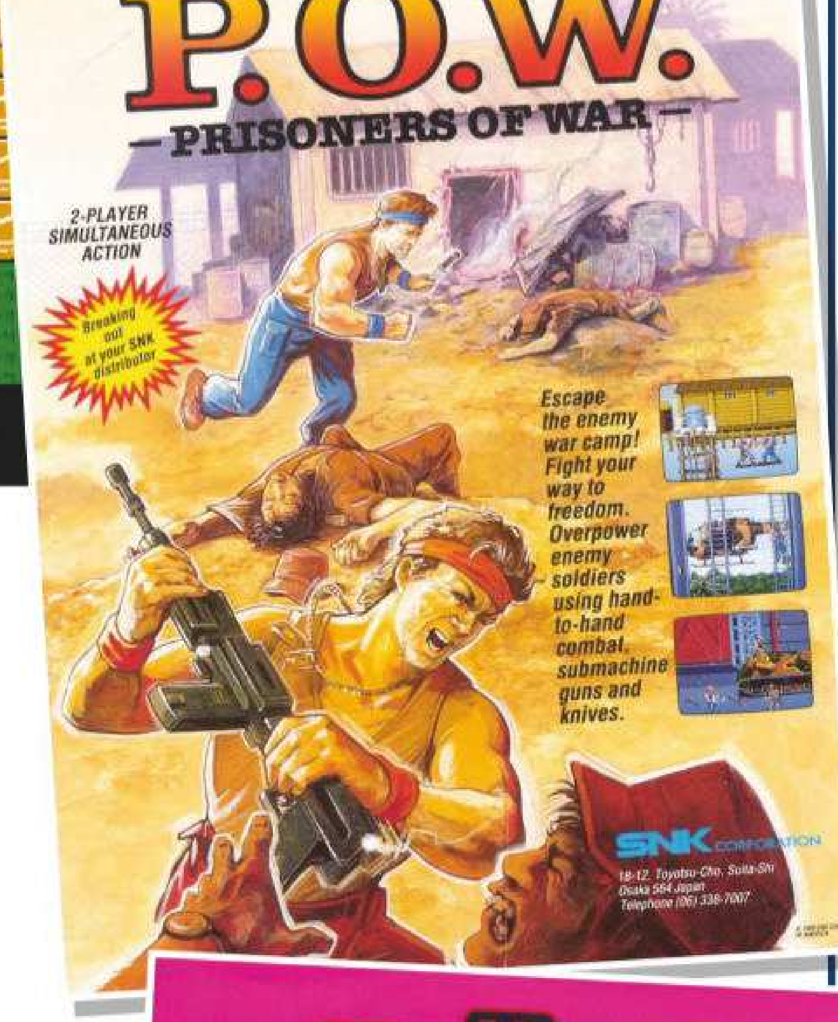
» [NES] *Crystalis* is one of SNK’s few original NES games, so its inclusion here is a welcome one.

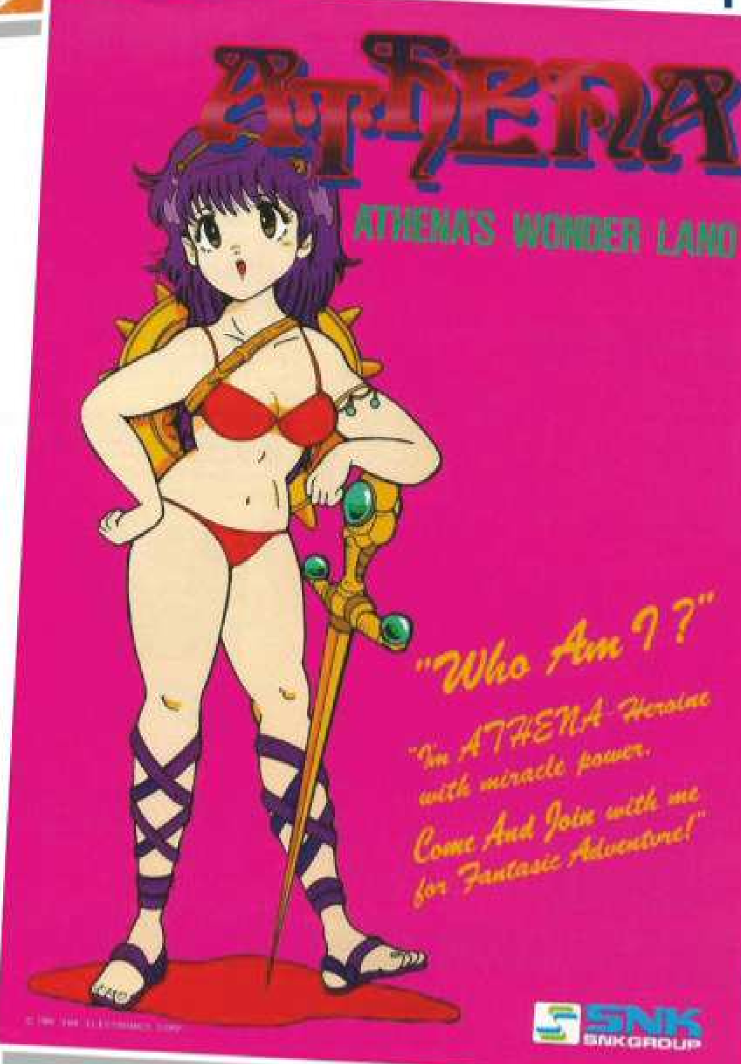


» [NES] *POW: Prisoner Of War* is the first SNK game that Frank played.

to trust. Reading it, it’s all pretty simple stuff in there, but you won’t imagine the work that went into it. I’ve got a pretty short description of *Micom Block* and *Space Micom* in the collection, but if I hadn’t taken that journey out to rural Japan, it would’ve been wrong, because the available information about the game was either incorrect or insufficient.”

If there’s one thing that’s obvious about Digital Eclipse, preservation of the past is incredibly important and it’s pleasing that companies like Digital Eclipse, M2 and many others go to great lengths to ensure that a new generation can enjoy the classics of yesterday. “‘Preserve’ is a loaded word, but I think the important part of what we’re doing here is contextualising the games,” concludes Frank. “If it’s just a compilation that loads some game ROMs, to me, that’s not a very compelling product. But because we offer easy access through Watch so you can experience the whole game without learning it, and because our Museum mode teaches you about the games and their place in history, people can do more than just play these games, they can understand them. And to me, doing that right now is *vital*. We’re in a unique time where we’re celebrating the golden age of this medium while its authors are still alive, and that’s not going to be the case for much longer. The more we can do to capture these stories, the better off the future will be in understanding gaming’s roots.” It’s something Brandon agrees on. “With this collection, we have brought SNK games back to life in a way that they can be played correctly for the first time in years. And as the developers get older, the memories about this time fade. Frank and I realised this might be our only shot at preserving SNK’s history… and there’s so much we couldn’t fit in to the compilation. If we don’t preserve these memories, nobody will. And SNK’s history is extremely interesting to me. They defined that Nineties arcade game feel. They defined the 2D fighting game world, outside of *Street Fighter*. They brought sound synthesis and vocal theme songs to arcade. They pioneered RPG systems in coin-ops. I mean… I wish we could preserve it all, I really do.”







Spectrum +3

» **MANUFACTURER:** Amstrad » **YEAR:** 1987 » **COST:** £249 (launch) £40+ (today)

In 1986 Amstrad shocked the gaming community when it revealed that it had purchased the rights to manufacture all existing and future Sinclair products. The price? A cool £5 million. Realising that there was still plenty of interest in the Spectrum brand, Amstrad's first stab at releasing a new machine was the Spectrum +2, a device that was very similar to its existing Amstrad CPC 464 in that it featured a built-in tape deck. A year later, in 1987, Amstrad released the Spectrum +3, which appeared quite similar in looks to the +2, but featured a black, rather than grey, case and a three-inch floppy disk drive.

Unfortunately, there was a lot going on under that black casing that lead to numerous issues for the 8-bit computer. Early releases of Amstrad's new Spectrum featured a distorted sound chip, while the addition of two extra 16KB ROMs and an operating system which was a modified version of Amstrad's PCWDOS meant that certain 48K and 128K games were incompatible with the device. The ZX Interface 1 was also completely unusable, creating a blow for anyone that had one.

While it proved to be reasonably successful (*Your Sinclair* reported in issue 60 that it represented around 15 per cent of all Spectrum sales), it was discontinued in 1990, coincidentally the same year Amstrad had a swanky new range of CPCs out.

Spectrum +3 Fact

■ A unique aspect of Amstrad's machine is that it's the only Spectrum model that can run the CP/M operating system without the need for additional hardware.

PROCESSOR: ZILOG Z80 A 3.5469 MHZ
RAM: 128 KB (8 X 16K PAGES)
GRAPHICS: 256 X 192, 8 COLOURS WITH NORMAL AND BRIGHT TONES
AUDIO: YAMAHA AY-3-8912 (THREE CHANNELS, EIGHT OCTAVES)
MEDIA: THREE-INCH DISKS



EDITOR'S CHOICE Starglider

The 48K version of *Starglider* is great fun on the original Spectrum, but developer Realtime Games really pulled out the stops when creating its 128K upgrade. In addition to adding cool touches such as in-game speech, a useful rear-view scanner and some neat slow-motion replays when you destroyed Starglider One, you also received a bunch of extra missions that weren't included in the original 48K version. And then, of course, there is the lovely lavish box it was all packaged in.



THE MAKING OF

The EIDOLON

After joining Lucasfilm Games and helping out with Rescue On Fractalus!, Charlie Kellner repurposed the game's engine for a new project. Charlie tells us how this innovation paved the way for his fantasy shooter, The Eidolon

Words by Rory Milne



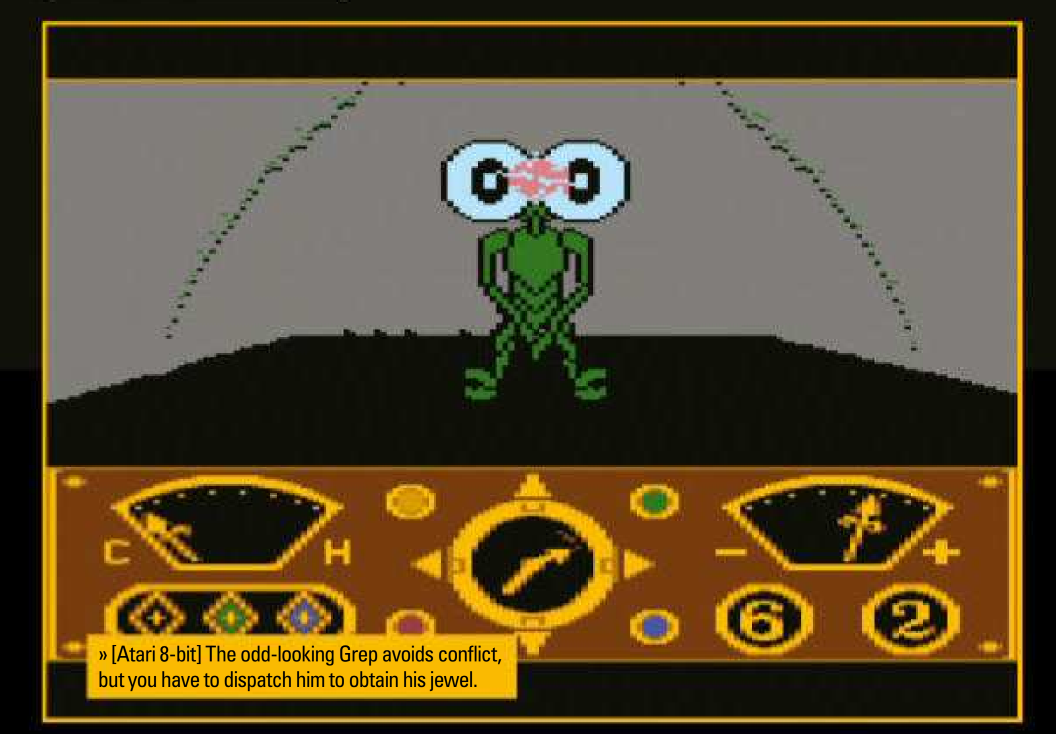
IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** Activision
» **DEVELOPER:** Lucasfilm Games
» **RELEASED:** 1985
» **PLATFORM:** Various
» **PLATFORM:** First-person shooter

In 1983 Apple Computer, Inc was preparing to usher in an exciting new era for personal computers in the shape of a product called the Macintosh. However, one of the team members developing software for the system, Charlie Kellner, had received an invitation that would lead to an even more exciting career. "I was working for Apple at the time, and had learned some things about how to speed up 6502 code," Charlie says of his time with the renowned tech firm. "I was invited to a party by David Fox, and he handed me his new business card, which said: 'Lucasfilm Games'. I just did a double-take, I said: 'What use does George Lucas have for videogames?' But it sounded really exciting, and Lucasfilm invited me over for an interview and hired me. My first task was to help Loren Carpenter to speed up his fractal drawing routine for *Rescue On Fractalus!*. After *Rescue*, we were looking for other things to do with it, and I figured out a way to turn the mountains upside down to generate caves."

Of course, Charlie's first-person cave systems required some actual gameplay, and so the coder wrote up his initial thoughts in a design document with the placeholder title: *The Dragon Game*. "It was a tournament with a dragon versus a knight, where you played the dragon," Charlie remembers. " But the problem was that it needed a lot of scenes. At minimum, it would need the caves – which were the dragon's home, a maze, some sort of open field – where he would do jousting, and a castle – where he would get stuff and bring it back to his lair. But the number of scenes gradually diminished as we realised that we were very limited in how much artwork we could do and how much time we had to do the coding. It eventually got down to just caves, but just a dragon walking around caves didn't seem very interesting, so we created a whole bunch of interesting creatures, and I put a sci-fi shell around it with a nod to HG Wells."

An additional change saw the makeshift title *The Dragon Game* replaced with something that Charlie felt better reflected his evolving project's visuals and its Victorian theme. "I'd been fascinated by mythology for what seemed like my whole life," Charlie recalls, "and there were certain words that I stumbled upon while I was reading. One of them was 'eidolon,' which is an imaginary image that carries power. Basically, that was what we were doing with the computer graphics; they


» [Atari 8-bit] The odd-looking Grep avoids conflict, but you have to dispatch him to obtain his jewel.


» [Atari 8-bit] This blue monstrosity is indestructible, and has to be transformed into a less-durable form.


» [Atari 8-bit] Hitting a wall instead of an opponent will drain your energy if a fireball bounces back at you.

"The Eidolon's control panel was a little cryptic, but the idea was that after playing once or twice you understood what each gauge did" Charlie Kellner


» Charlie Kellner was the driving force behind Lucasfilm's innovative first-person adventure/shooter.

were insubstantial images that were meaningful, and you needed to interact with them. '*Eidolon*' also suggested to me some sort of steampunk-powered machine that you could travel in."

But in order to portray this Victorian craft within a first-person engine, its depiction had to be limited to a control panel covered with dials and gauges. "The look of the *Eidolon*'s control panel wasn't really intended to be sophisticated," Charlie argues, "it was Victorian style, in keeping with the genre in which the game was set. Back in those days, players would usually determine what a certain gauge did by how it was affected by the gameplay. People didn't usually read the manual, they just launched in and played the game. So the *Eidolon*'s control panel was a little cryptic, but the idea was that after playing once or twice you understood what each gauge did."

» [Atari 8-bit] Blue fireballs freeze time, which is useful in your race against the clock.

As well as the *Eidolon*'s control panel, further design duties awaited Lucasfilm Games artist Gary Winnick, who subsequently struck upon a brilliant solution for creating creatures for Charlie's game. "Our characters were done by cell animation, where the body, legs, tail, wings and head were all separate pieces," Charlie reveals. "Each creature was maybe ten different pieces of animation that all needed to be drawn on top of each other every frame. That was the only way we could store that many graphics in the available memory. We didn't have proper drawing tools at the time, so our artist Gary Winnick drew outlines of the characters on pieces of celluloid film that he would tape to the game monitor, and then use the joystick to colour in the pixels underneath. He was able to optimise the graphics on the screen because he could make every pixel count."

Gary's creations combined sci-fi, fantasy and the surreal, and included everything from trolls to houseflies with helicopter rotors, but equally important were the dragon bosses he designed. "Gary was into dragons, and I guess I was too, so dragons wound-up being a natural inclusion," Charlie reasons. "We tried to make the dragons as diverse as we could. Each one looked different, and they represented a different kind of magic, but I guess that didn't really come off in the gameplay. The story was that an inventor was exploring the depths of his own mind, and that the dragons represented the limitations that he thought were stopping him from succeeding, so he would need to use different strategies to defeat each one."

However, Charlie's innovative animation engine placed limits on the strategic elements of *The Eidolon*'s boss fights, and so he devised a system where firing blindly would result in fireballs ricocheting off bosses' projectiles and back at the player. "It was a way to make the contest seem fair," Charlie points out. "You couldn't just walk up to the dragons, shoot them and win, you had to use strategy. We had a very limited amount of dodging that you could do, but you could aim and decide where and how to hit them. They didn't move around, but that was mostly a limitation



THE EIDOLON 101

■ Although it doesn't feel like an FPS, *The Eidolon* is depicted using a first-person perspective and shooting its surreal characters is a core objective. Exploration of *The Eidolon*'s sprawling caves is equally essential, as is experimentation to determine the effects of your coloured fireballs.

HERE BE DRAGONS!

How to beat The Eidolon's eight dragon bosses

LEVEL 2
■ A green jewel is required to enter the domain of the second boss. Once in battle, fire off yellow fireballs, collect what's fired back and repeat until four shots connect.

LEVEL 4
■ Collect red and green jewels to enter the fourth stage's arena. Maintain half your energy by collecting the boss's fireballs, and land six blue fireballs to beat him.

LEVEL 1
■ You need the red jewel to breach the first dragon's lair, which takes a bit of exploration to find, then blast the boss with three red fireballs before he retaliates.

LEVEL 3
■ Find a blue jewel before locating level three's dragon. When he fireballs you collect all you can, then between volleys fire green fireballs. Five hits will bring him down.



of the graphics, as it cost everything we had in the storage of the game to be able to put all of those different dragons on the screen."

Additional concessions followed, including plans to have multiple creatures moving around the screen, which proved too much of a stretch for Charlie's animation routines. "I tried hard to get these variably-sized creatures to be as fast as possible and managed to get them up to one-quarter of the speed of a fixed-size drawing, which was pretty fast considering," Charlie ponders. "But still, it was barely fast enough to have one creature on the screen at a time. Of course, we had no hardware assist at all, so it was a battle to try and make something that was moving fast enough that you could actually have fun playing."

Another concept was scaled back rather than being dropped altogether, which started out as peaceful character interaction and ended up with creatures that were docile until fired on. "The idea was that any creature would try to defend itself when it was attacked, but you didn't necessarily need to attack it," Charlie explains. "We were trying to extend the whole idea of computer games; we wanted our games to be more film-like than you had seen before. There wasn't any way we could give players a movie-like experience on such a small screen with such a small processor, but to the extent that we aspired to it I felt that we made it a better game."

A design decision of a different sort revolved around the difficulty of *The Eidolon*, which Charlie resolved by carefully gauging the challenge of the game's cave systems. "It was a constant battle between simplifying the game and making it complex enough to be interesting," Charlie concedes. "So I chose to make the mazes complex, but not too complex, so that you could solve them by wandering around. The caves were actually random. There was a cave-building routine in there that would generate caves. The idea was that we wanted to have an algorithm that could generate caves that were difficult to explore because they were different each time."

But while Charlie's code rendered distinctive caves for each of *The Eidolon*'s core stages, the designer took inspiration from the arcades when it came to designing the game's final level, and its boss ended up being just as unique. "One of the other games that I found fascinating back in that day was *Tempest*," Charlie enthuses. "There was a level high up where the grid that the creatures were climbing around on was invisible. So I wanted to have a level in *The Eidolon* where the

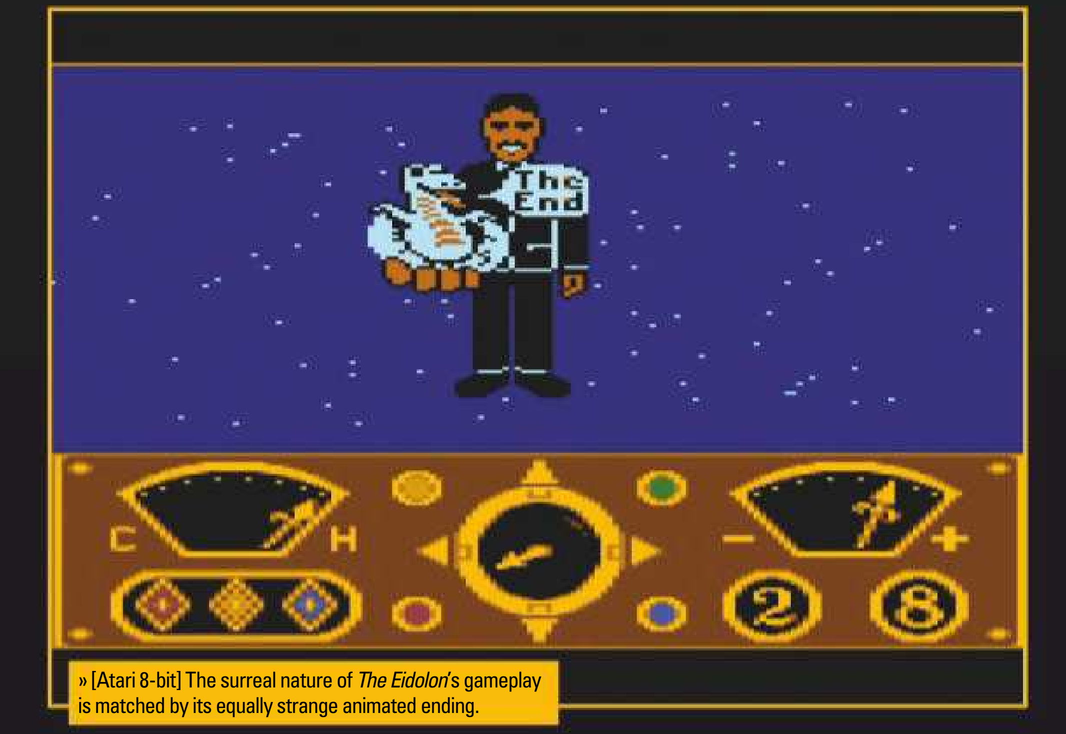
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1984

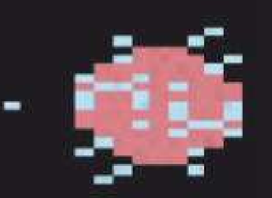
THE EIDOLON
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1985

LABYRINTH (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: VARIOUS
YEAR: 1986





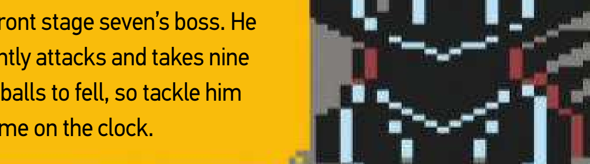
» [Atari 8-bit] The surreal nature of *The Eidolon*'s gameplay is matched by its equally strange animated ending.





LEVEL 6

■ Red and blue jewels get you access to the sixth boss. Eight blue fireballs will topple him, but they eat through energy, so fire two, collect enemy fire and repeat.



LEVEL 7

■ Get the red, green and blue jewels to confront stage seven's boss. He constantly attacks and takes nine red fireballs to fell, so tackle him with time on the clock.

LEVEL 5

■ Use blue and green jewels to unlock level five's boss. Land yellow fireballs when he rests, until he's taken seven, and collect return fire when you're not blasting.

> "You couldn't just walk up to the dragons, shoot them and win; you had to use some sort of strategy"
> Charlie Kellner

LEVEL 8

■ Jewels aren't needed to face the final boss. Hit him with this sequence of fireballs, changing colour each time he does: red, yellow, green, blue, yellow, blue, red.

cave maze was invisible, and you could only find your way around it by bumping into the walls. We wanted the final boss to be a tough opponent, so we had a multiheaded dragon, and that was a real animation nightmare. But Gary did a wonderful job, and it wound up being bewildering to look at considering the limitations of our graphics."

T*he Eidolon*'s stunning visuals, not to mention its hybrid genre gameplay, also drew praise from magazine reviewers and players when it came to the game's release, but Charlie's memories of *The Eidolon*'s reception are incredibly humble. "Really the excitement about *The Eidolon*'s graphics was down to Gary's extraordinary artwork," Charlie remarks. "I was really worried about the game being a total flop because I wanted to do so much with it and wound up, in my opinion, doing so little. So I was just really thankful that people liked it."

Time has given the developer a different perspective, however, and although there are aspects of *The Eidolon* that Charlie would change given hindsight, he ultimately has nothing but pride for his team's creation. "I think it wouldn't have cost very much to make the dragons move around a bit," Charlie notes, "and I would have tried to make a more meaningful combat system. I definitely would have made a more peaceful way of interacting with the other creatures. But looking back on *The Eidolon* after so many years, I'm proud of what we did. I think it's kind of amazing that we were able to do that much back then with those machines. Our little team of pioneers loved to try the untried and to explore what was possible, and I think that everyone that was involved with *The Eidolon* can be proud of it." ★

CONVERSION CAPERS

A comparison of the various Eidolon ports













C64

■ The C64 *Eidolon* was produced in-house, so unsurprisingly it plays just like the original. It has different rather than better sound effects than the Atari version, and its control panel isn't as attractive when time is frozen, but the visual effect it renders when you find a dragon's lair is more aesthetically pleasing.

APPLE II

■ Another Lucasfilm Games adaptation that faithfully translates the original's design. The Apple II's less-powerful hardware restricts the port to lower-res, less colourful graphics, single-channel pregame music and less impressive sound effects, but more importantly it runs just as fast as its Atari counterpart.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ One of four conversions handled by UK developers Tony Adams and Tony Porter, the Amstrad *Eidolon* is slower than its Atari inspiration, but on the plus side it's rendered with a brighter palette. The CPC adaptation plays a nice rendition of the original's intro music, but its sound effects are far more basic.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Like the Amstrad iteration, the Spectrum *Eidolon* runs a little slower than the original. Also in keeping with the CPC version, the Spectrum port retains the Atari game's high-res visuals, although predictably it uses less colours. That aside, the ZX *Eidolon*'s only failing is that each level has to be loaded in separately.

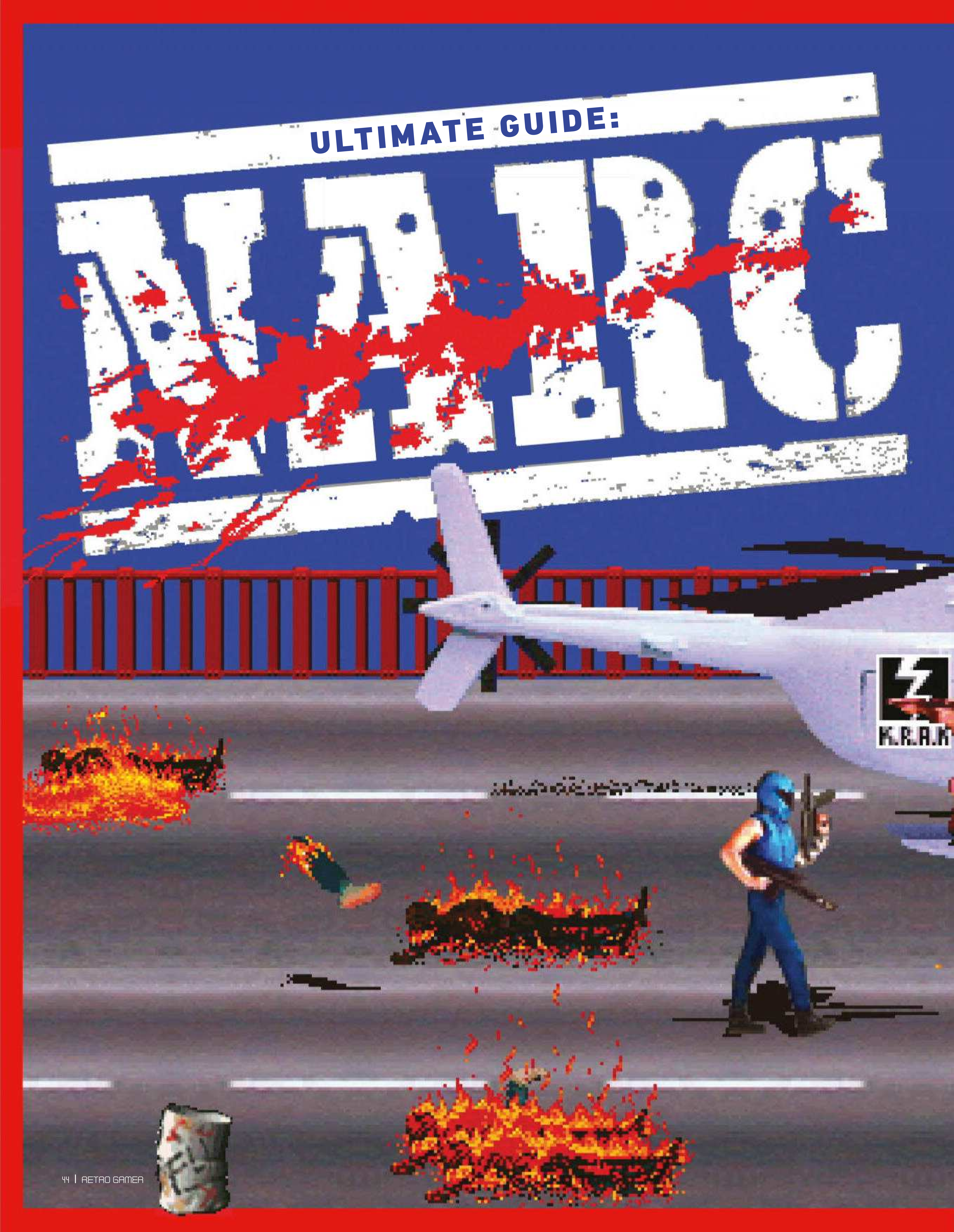
MSX2

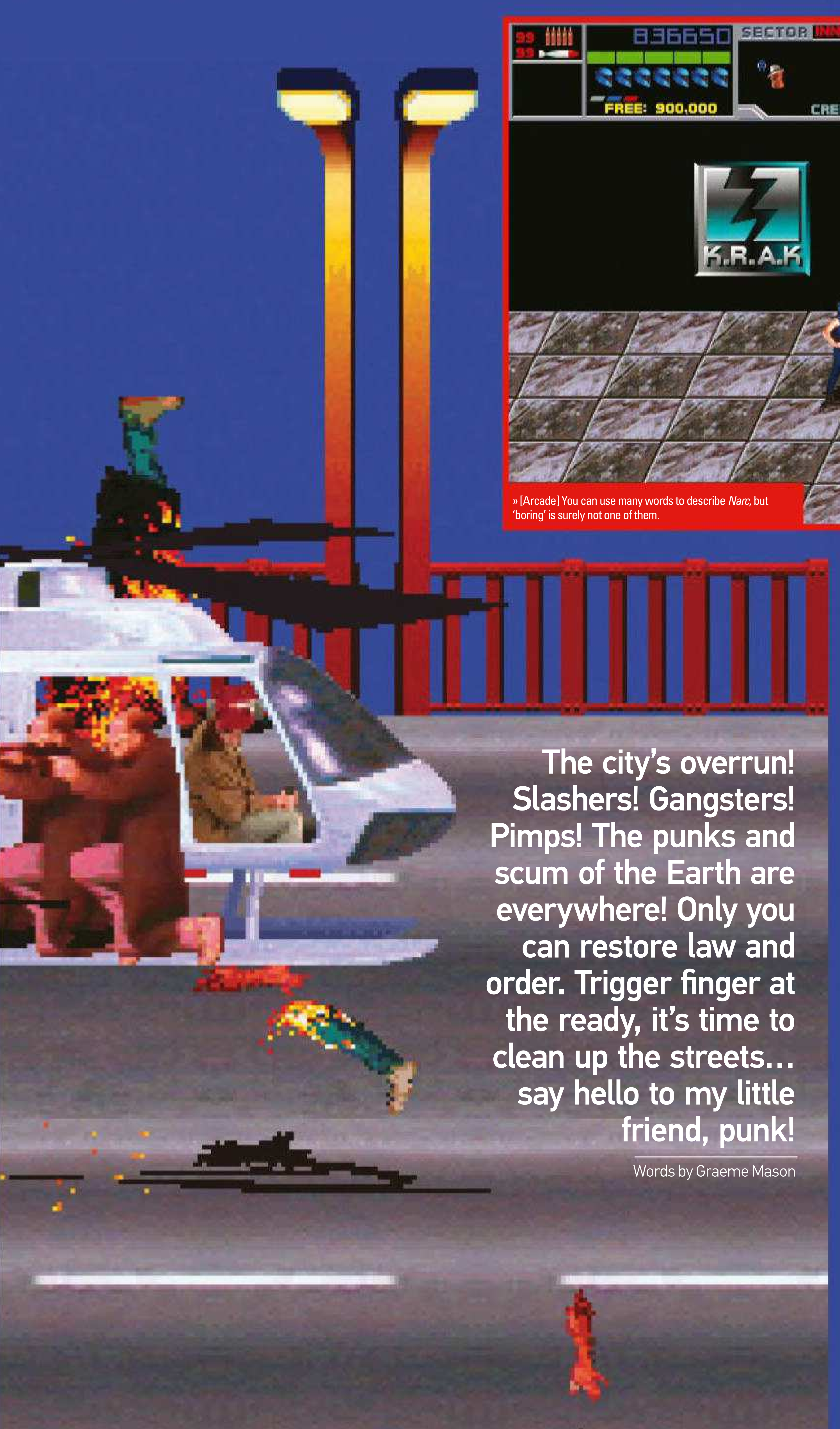
■ Despite lacking speed, although no more than the CPC and Spectrum versions, the MSX2 *Eidolon* is a good translation of the original in terms of visuals and its opening tune. It's shy of a few sound effects, which leads to spells of silence, but its gameplay is identical to the Atari original.

PC-88

■ Although not perfect, the PC-88 *Eidolon* is just as fast as the original. Its drawbacks are that it lacks colour in certain places, doesn't quite match the Atari version's sound effects and suffers from flickery character animation. These minor quibbles aside, the PC-88 conversion feels and plays just like its inspiration.

ULTIMATE GUIDE: NARC





» [Arcade] You can use many words to describe *Narc*, but 'boring' is surely not one of them.

The city's overrun! Slashers! Gangsters! Pimps! The punks and scum of the Earth are everywhere! Only you can restore law and order. Trigger finger at the ready, it's time to clean up the streets… say hello to my little friend, punk!

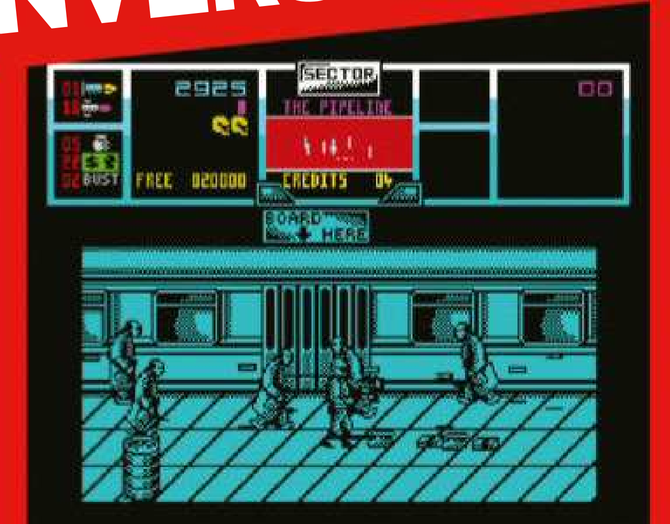
Words by Graeme Mason

Chances are you've never played a game like *Narc*. Violent, seedy and over-the-top, it's a right-wing Eighties action movie merged with an overcooked anti-drug message, and was rumoured to be the favourite videogame of that well-known gamer, and former US first lady, Nancy Reagan. Pre-empting parent-baiting titles such as *Grand Theft Auto* by at least ten years, *Narc* was designed by Eugene Jarvis with coding by George Petro and released in arcades in 1988. Following Williams Electronics' acquisition by Midway Games, it was touted as the company's comeback.

And it's ludicrous. So absolutely, pants-wettingly stupid, that it's impossible to imagine its designer and coder not guffawing at themselves with every overblown piece of gameplay or plot they added. Let's start with the main playable characters, two rogue cops by the name of Max Force and Hit Man. Dressed in colourful combat armour (blue and red), they also boast motorcycle helmets and have a distinctive lack of subtlety. These futuristic police officers must infiltrate the world of Mr Big, king of the criminal underworld in a miserable and destitute city. In their way stand hordes of pimps, gangsters, junkies and psychotic madmen, all intent on taking our heroes down as messily as possible. These crooks must be pacified by whatever means, a delightful euphemism for the slaughter that pervades every corner of *Narc*.

Each level scrolls horizontally from left to right with the display a semi-3D effect as the characters move in and out of the scenery, and contains doors from which enemies emerge, or are used to exit to the next area. To use this, the player must find a coloured key card, usually left strewn on the floor or held by an enemy goon. As with most

CONVERSION CAPERS



ZX SPECTRUM

■ While it inevitably eliminated all the colour of the arcade game save for a variable two-tone, this Spectrum version is an impressive effort. It's a little on the slow side, but an admirable amount of the original is present, including the levels within levels and vast range of enemies. 128k only, but a noble effort by The Sales Curve and Ocean.



AMSTRAD CPC

■ Seemingly slower than the Spectrum port (which is odd considering it shares similar code), the Amstrad adds some much needed colour, but is poorer in almost every other department. Sound is absent, and the graphics often descend into a gaudy explosion of random and indecipherable pixels. The worst of the 8-bit conversions.



AMIGA

■ The Amiga seemed to be saddled with poor arcade conversions in the early Nineties, but this is a decent effort, if not quite up to the standard of its supposed inferior sibling, the C64. More turgid in pace, Amiga *Narc* lacks the crunching gameplay of the C64, and just comes across as a little dull.



» [Arcade] Just your typical American street, nothing unusual to see here in the slightest.

arcade games, it begins slowly, before a swarm of criminals descend upon the narcs. The default weapon is a automatic machine pistol, which holds a limited amount of ammunition. Rockets can also be picked up which can be used to terminate with extreme prejudice, although bystanders must be avoided. It's not all gunplay, however; Max Force and Hit Man are policemen, and can apprehend enemies by simply walking up to them and using one of an infinite supply of handcuffs.

Dropped evidence (usually a drugs stash or money) can then be collected, although this approach is as predictably hazardous as you might expect, given that the stooges of Mr Big are armed with guns, syringes or worse. Shooting them is much safer, and satisfying, despite the point bonus that arrests can yield.

Starting out in an abandoned junkyard, the player is soon assaulted by numerous (and identical) trench-coated junkies. After a brief gang takedown in a dank subway, it's off to a secret laboratory where addict scientist Dr Spike Rush, AKA Hypoman, is busy manufacturing drugs for sale on the street. Here the game's violence takes an odd turn. Attacked by vicious rottweilers, the cops must retaliate or be chewed to death. Yet peculiarly, unlike their human owners who slink into the ground upon death, these hounds mutate back into puppies when shot, and scurry off, presumably to reconsider their life options. Further sojourns across a bridge and a verdant nursery lead the player to Mr Big's offices, and the home of his organisation, Krak. Battle your way past hordes of boardroom gangsters and there's a face-off with Mr Big himself, no longer the wheelchair-bound crime lord. In a glorious, ridiculous, and entirely unexpected conclusion, Mr Big is transformed into a grinning and swollen head, shooting missiles at our heroes. Hit him with enough rockets and he transforms again, into a steel skull, complete with elongated spine and spitting what appears to be lumps of flesh at the cops.

And then there's the car. Eschewing a boring squad car or unmarked sedan, this pair of detectives drive an understated bright red Porsche, complete with rockets, front-mounted machine guns and an on-board computer that reveals details of each arch-criminal awaiting them. Appearing on the lengthy bridge section, it can be driven at breakneck speeds with a complete disregard for human life, let alone traffic regulations. Alas, such careless driving often results in the explosive destruction of the notoriously fragile vehicle, complete with a comedic bouncing wheel. Each narc begins the game with three lives, and an energy bar for each one, which is sapped with disarming ease by the miscreants of the city.

Upon release in arcades, *Narc* caused a furore among parents who naturally objected to their children being exposed to such a bloodythirsty approach to law enforcement, while the seedy tone of the game appeared to escape censure. Given the parade of dismembered bloody







COMMODORE 64

■ Coded by Simon Pick, this was to be his last C64 game, and what an effort to bow out on. Considerably quicker than its 8-bit peers, the blocky graphics of the Commodore computer suit the game perfectly. It's also wonderful to play and has a great tune, making it one of the best arcade conversions for the C64.

ATARI ST

■ Sharing a bunch of code with the Amiga results in an average Atari ST port, additionally hampered by some jerky scrolling. It's a shame because the nuggets of a good game are here, and the port just lacks a little bit of polish in its gameplay. However, presentation, as with the Amiga game, is top notch.

NES

■ Taking one of the most violent arcade games in history and converting it to the family friendly Nintendo Entertainment System was, err, bold. To be fair, it's an excellent conversion by Rare and Acclaim, moving at a good pace and retaining much of the original gameplay, albeit with toned-down crimson effects.

PIXEL PERFECT



Nice Doggy · Chopper · Giant Thug · Max Force · Armed Pusher · Junkie · Deranged Junkie

Suspicious Plant · Chemical Barrel · Pusher · Bin · Bouncing Wheel · Cash Stash · Drugs Stash · Door Key · Flaming Cadaver · Prostitute



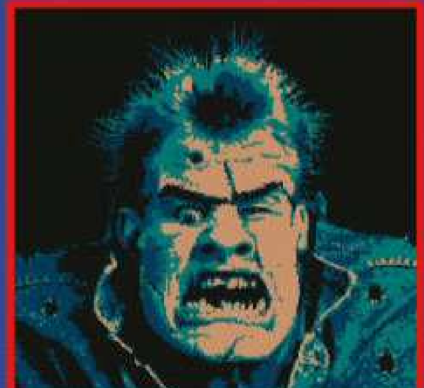
Disgusting Dumpster · Sports Car · Crashed Car · Rundown Night Club

ROGUE'S GALLERY



THE DAS LOF GANG

■ The narcs' first task is to take out Mr Big's distribution, which is being handled by a gang called the Das Lof. Wearing trench coats that disguise their wares, these punks soon swarm all over the cops, and must be shot, or busted for a juicy bonus.



JOE ROCKHEAD

■ The narcs are giving Mr Big a serious headache, leaving him no choice but to crack out the tough guys. Sent into a frenzied steroid rage, Joe Rockhead is powerful and feels no pain, making him tough to kill. If he grabs you, it'll be a helluva cuddle.



DR SPIKE RUSH

■ Through interrogation of Das Lof members, the location of the lab supplying Mr Big's drugs is revealed, and Dr Spike Rush is cooking up a potent mix. He's a dangerous opponent, however, hurling poisonous syringes at every opportunity.

MR. BIG

This is it, the big man calling all the shots. First appearing in a wheelchair, Mr Big retreats to his lair under fire, before revealing his true form. A gigantic head astride a moving silver platform, rain enough fire down on him and he changes again, into a metallic skull. Crikey.



KINKY PINKY

■ Before finally reaching Mr Big's HQ, the narcs have to negotiate the mean and dirty streets of downtown. Wielding a kitchen knife and wearing a, frankly frightening, clown mask, Kinky Pinky rules here, and his members are not averse to abducting the odd passerby.



SGT SKY HIGH

■ The labs destroyed, now it's time to hunt down where the marijuana is coming from, and see who's guarding it. That role falls to Sgt Sky High, veteran soldier, dope addict and custodian of Mr Big's nursery. Despatch the villain and make sure you collect some plants – they're evidence!



HQ POSSE

■ Finally the narcs penetrate Mr Big's HQ, but not before being confronted by legions of his zoot suited mobsters. Armed to the teeth with machine pistols, these gangsters are the ultimate in corporate assassins and will harangue you all the way to Mr Big's lair.

» [Arcade] They say crime doesn't pay, but kicking crime's ass sure as heck does.





» [Arcade] Whatever Mr Big is pushing, we don't want any of it.





Q&A: SIMON PICK

We speak to the coder behind the Commodore 64 version of Narc and producer for The Sales Curve about all the home conversions of the arcade run-and-gun



How did The Sales Curve get the *Narc* job?

As part of her five-year plan to become a publisher, Jane [Cavanagh, Sales Curve founder] was developing titles for a few publishers. We used each project to hire new coders and artists to grow the internal development team, Random Access. The quality and success of *Silkworm*, combined with Jane's negotiating skills, made it easy for us to get work.

What was your role?

There were essentially three versions of the game. The C64 was standalone, the Spectrum and Amstrad shared code, as did the Amiga and ST versions. My role, in addition to coding the C64, was to track progress, ensuring that we hit deadlines. I also put the team together.

Did you have access to a *Narc* arcade machine?

Yes, a cabinet in the office. One of the first orders of business was to grab the sprite images from the ROMs, Matt Spall was our IT guy who did this for us. We couldn't directly use these as they were too high-res and colourful, but they were super useful as reference material. Trivia: Matt is the brother of actor Timothy Spall!

Were you aware of the arcade game and its reputation?

No, we weren't aware. Most games around that time involved shooting things, the whole drug culture stuff went over our heads at the time. I think it dodged a bullet by minimising the blood, and having the bad guys sink into the floor instead of hanging around dead.

Were there any issues during development of *Narc*?

About a month before the end of development, Dave Leitch was still struggling to get the ZX Spectrum version running fast enough. It was almost okay, but still chugged badly at times. Then, one day he realised that he was updating the screen twice for every game cycle – technically speaking, he was copying the screen's back buffer across to video memory twice. He removed that pointless second update and overnight the game became super-fast and much more playable!

Were you pleased with your efforts on the C64 and how well did it sell?

Yes, there were a lot of things that I was very pleased with: simultaneous two-player mode, the colour scroll, bullets with shadows, the scanner and spray-painted letters. All of those things were fairly tricky to get right. I think they all did reasonably well, but it was towards the end of the 8-bit era, so I don't suppose the Commodore 64, Spectrum or Amstrad versions would have sold very many.

Given the deadlines, was there a 'crunch'?

There was a period where I was working from home, putting crazy hours in. Being several years before the internet or email, every couple of days I would make a disk, walk to the local station and use British Rail's same-day delivery service – Red Star I think it was called – to get the disk up to Clapham Junction, the closest station to The Sales Curve QA. They would play the game then fax me a list of bugs, which I'd work on before sending them another disk two days later. How times have changed!

limbs every time the player uses the rocket launcher, this is perhaps unsurprising. The game's angular upright cabinet is slightly unusual in that the controls are housed separately and below the monitor, which sits within its own rectangular unit above the main machine. A brace of eight-way joysticks are used to control the characters, and besides these sit four buttons, fire, missile, jump and crouch. Under the hood, *Narc* contains a Texas Instrument circuit, the TMS34010, and became one of the first games to utilise this integrated graphics processor. Its ability to create higher definition sprites would be further exploited in games such as *Mortal Kombat* and *NBA Jam*.

Given its infamy and success, home conversions of *Narc* followed two years later. The majority of these were published by Ocean Software, and developed at The Sales Curve via its internal team, Random Access. Unusually for a home arcade conversion, *Narc* received almost universal praise from the games press, especially for the two Commodore computers. The lone dissenting voice came from *Your Sinclair*, although its beef concerned more the content of the game rather than its quality. Finally, the NES version was released by Acclaim Entertainment, but was developed by Rare, thus retaining the British connection across all the home ports.

Looking back at *Narc*, it's perhaps hard to see what the fuss was about. Influenced by the pulpy action movies of the day, and dystopian sci-fi flicks such as *The Terminator* and *Robocop*, it pulls few punches in its depiction of the urban wasteland, yet contains nothing particularly fresh for modern audiences, except perhaps for its tongue-in-cheek tone. Many of *Narc*'s characters went on to star in Acclaim's *The Power Team* cartoon, most notably *Max Force* and the game's chief villain, Mr Big, giving *Narc* life beyond the arcades and home conversions. Midway later attempted to reboot the series on PS2 in 2005, adding star power in the form of Ron Perlman and Michael Madson, but it failed to impress. While the remake has sunk into the swamp where games go to be forgotten, the original *Narc* remains a fan favourite, and with its unique visuals and tone, it's clear to see why its so fondly remembered. ★


GAME BOY
COLOR
COMM.
POWER
LIFE
002
001
GAME BOY COLOR
Nintendo
A
B
SELECT
START

A Game Boy with colour graphics was always going to happen, it was just a case of when. Yet few would have guessed that Nintendo would wait nine and a half years before releasing the Game Boy Color. So was it worth waiting for?

Words by Martyn Carroll

The Game Boy Color was part of the Game Boy line, an upgrade of the original monochrome machine that sold millions and won the handheld gaming market for Nintendo. The firm itself has always been clear that it was not a successor. Indeed it groups worldwide sales of the original Game Boy, the smaller Game Boy Pocket, the backlit Game Boy Light and the Game Boy Color together (that's a total of 119 million units, big number fans).

But whereas the Pocket and the Light were upgrades in the most functional sense, the Game Boy Color was a clear enhancement over earlier models. Obviously, colour graphics were its key reason for existing. Compared to the monochrome Game Boy and its four shades of grey, the GBC was able to display 56 simultaneous colours from a palette of 32,000. Nintendo claimed that the device displayed "brilliant color (sic)", but that was a slight stretch as the screen wasn't backlit (in order to save all-important battery life). Instead the screen utilised reflective technology, so just like the original Game Boy, it looked great if you were playing outside on a sunny day, but its lustre diminished in low-light conditions.

The colour display was the main selling point, but the device also benefitted from an overall hardware boost to better serve game developers. The processor remained the same – a custom 8-bit CPU that was similar to the Z80 – but its clock speed was doubled to 8MHz. Video RAM was also doubled, to 16Kb, while main memory was quadrupled to 32Kb (which still sounds minute but remember that game data was stored on ROM cartridges, which could now be up to 8Mb in size). The DMA (Direct Memory Access) capabilities were enhanced too, speeding up data transfer to the new screen.

Outwardly the Game Boy Color was very similar to the earlier Game Boy Pocket, although the device was a little larger and the screen was slightly smaller. Most familiar features were retained – the classic d-pad, the four buttons (A, B, Start, Select), the volume dial, the headphone jack, link cable port and so on. It took two AA batteries, compared to the Pocket's two AAA batteries, but battery life was comparable at around ten hours of play from a full charge. Considering the faster processor and colour screen, that was quite a coup from Nintendo.

The Game Boy Color was released worldwide in 1998, yet rumours about a colour handheld had been around almost as long as the Game Boy itself. "It does exist, I have seen it," claimed Jason Spiller in the launch issue of *GB Action* magazine – published in 1992! "During a brief wander around the Consumer Electronic Show, I popped my head around a



» Bob Baffy thoroughly enjoyed making games for Nintendo's colour handheld.



» Mike Mika is a big fan of the Game Boy Color and currently works at Digital Eclipse.





> "As a successor to the original the GBC ticked all the right boxes"
>
> Bob Pape

corner of a mysterious-looking room and there it was. No doubt about it. The colour Game Boy is real."

The article predicted a release date of September 1993. So just five years out. We should go easy on the team as this was a classic gaming mag 'expose'. Having no actual assets to show, the article was illustrated with a mocked-up photo of an original Game Boy with a 'coloured-in' version of *Tetris* slapped on the screen. Other predictions were accurate, though obvious – as portable as the original and priced under £100 (it would eventually retail for £80 at launch in



» [Game Boy Color] The DX upgrade of *Legend Of Zelda: Link's Awakening* added a 'Color Dungeon' that showcased the system's new hues.

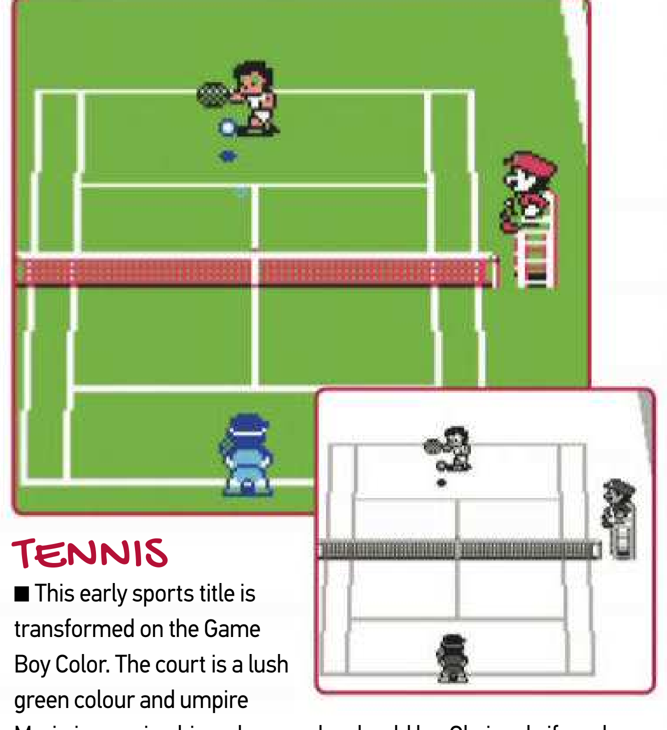
the UK). But there was a very interesting forecast at the end of the article: "It's rumoured that the colour machine *will* play your old mono games."

Now this was a bold prediction. These days Nintendo is known as an advocate of backwards compatibility, but back then its home consoles were not compatible with each other. Surely it would be painting itself into a *Qix*-style corner by retaining compatibility for the old Game Boy? Maybe not in 1993, but five years later? The truth is that Nintendo did scope out a much more powerful 32-bit handheld in the mid-Nineties, under the Project Atlantis moniker, but in the end it opted for a successor that could play the vast catalogue of mono GB games. And that decision had ramifications for the GBC.

"Backwards compatibility more or less defined technically what the Game Boy Color would eventually have to become," says Bob Pape, who developed games for both the Game Boy and GBC, including the celebrated conversion *R-Type DX*. "Nintendo probably came up with all sorts of alternatives and I'm sure they looked at the Sega Game Gear and Atari Lynx for what *not* to do with a colour handheld. As a successor to the original the GBC ticked all the right boxes with regard to size, battery life, reliability and most importantly backwards compatibility. Radically changing anything would have disrupted the upgrade path. It would have pretty much killed off the pre-existing Game Boy market and annoyed customers left with a game collection they could only play on yesterday's console."

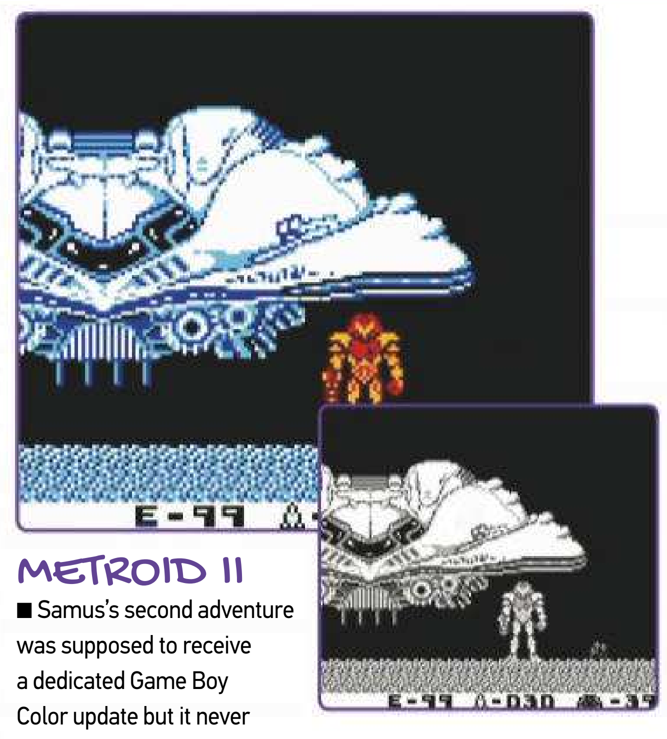
Let there be COLOR

Monochrome games that were brought to life on the GBC



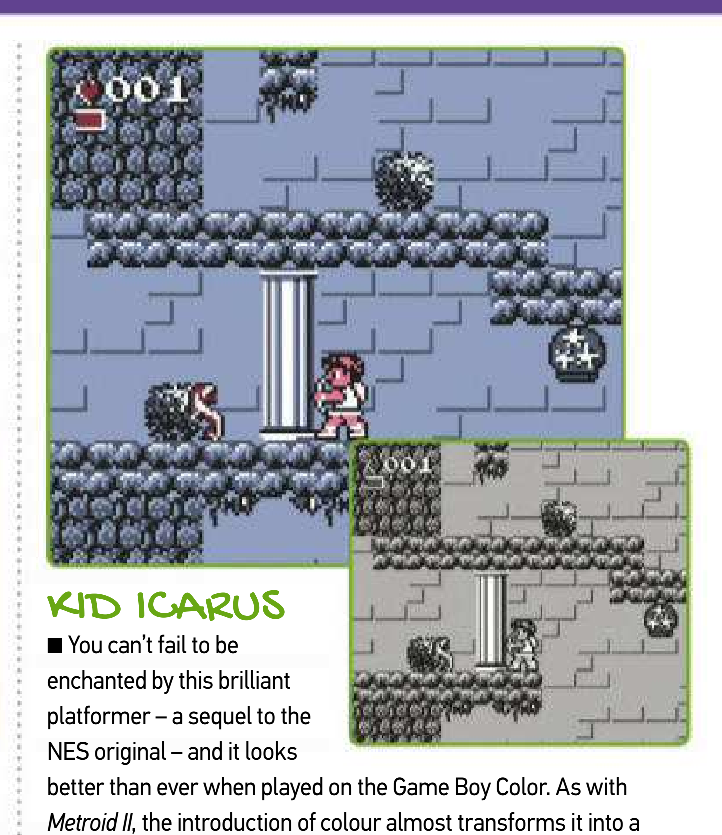
TENNIS

■ This early sports title is transformed on the Game Boy Color. The court is a lush green colour and umpire Mario is wearing his red cap, as he should be. Obviously if you have a GBC then your go-to Tennis game should be the excellent *Mario Tennis*, but the original has a certain charm.



METROID II

■ Samus's second adventure was supposed to receive a dedicated Game Boy Color update but it never materialised. That was possibly because the colourised version looked so good that a new release wasn't warranted. While playing it's easy to forget that this is a mono Game Boy game.



KID ICARUS

■ You can't fail to be enchanted by this brilliant platformer – a sequel to the NES original – and it looks better than ever when played on the Game Boy Color. As with *Metroid II*, the introduction of colour almost transforms it into a brand-new game, with the sprites popping off the screen.

The Game Boy Color could play all of the existing grey-coloured Game Boy carts, and as an added bonus it would 'colourise' old games. This worked a lot like the Super Game Boy add-on for the SNES, where the shades of grey could be substituted for distinct colours. There were a number of preset palettes which the user could select when the game started up. Furthermore, the device included dedicated palettes for more than 90 key titles (mainly first-party releases and popular games from other publishers). So ancient titles like *Tetris* and *Super Mario Land* were given a new and enhanced lease of life on the GBC. It was clever tech, where the GBC would grab the game title from the cart's header during the boot procedure and then apply a dedicated palette if one was available. It was so clever that it gave birth to an amusing myth that all monochromatic GB games were actually developed with colour graphics, it was just that the poor GB couldn't display them!

In addition to backwards compatibility, Nintendo also introduced forwards compatibility to the Game Boy line. Many of the early Game Boy Color titles, such as *Tetris DX* and *Pocket Bomberman*, were designed to play on the older GB by effectively ignoring the colour information. It was also possible to store separate GB and GBC versions on a single cart, with the correct version selected on start-up (*R-Type DX* and *Conker's Pockets Tales* were two examples that did this). These compatible 'dual mode' carts were identified by their black cases, while later games that would only run on the GBC came in clear cases.

The comprehensive upgrade path chosen by Nintendo was welcomed by Mike Mika, director and programmer at prolific Game Boy developer Digital Eclipse. He says: "I was already a huge fan of the original Game Boy, so when the Game Boy Color was announced I was worried that I'd have to learn an entirely new architecture. It was amazing how Nintendo managed to create a device that played GB games as well as introducing some key bits of hardware that made the system feel entirely new. It doubled the processing and introduced hardware DMA transfers, which became critical to our success on the platform. We could pretty much reload entire graphic sets every frame to give us full-screen animation and complex sprite displays. It was powerful enough for us to deliver a pretty decent version of *Dragon's Lair* and develop Disney quality animation that paid homage to some of Virgin's Disney titles on home consoles."

Mike's Digital Eclipse colleague Bob Baffy was also a fan. "I was impressed with how Nintendo handled the technical challenges of adding colour to an already established platform without too much breakage or incompatibility. It wasn't perfect, but man was it fun to develop for the Game Boy Color." For Bob the limitations were obvious, particularly as he specialised in sound and music. "More memory for audio and art, and a little speed boost would have made some things less painful," he says. "But given the state of technology at the time I felt it was a pretty well-rounded piece of hardware. Being selfish, a bigger and more powerful speaker would have been nice."

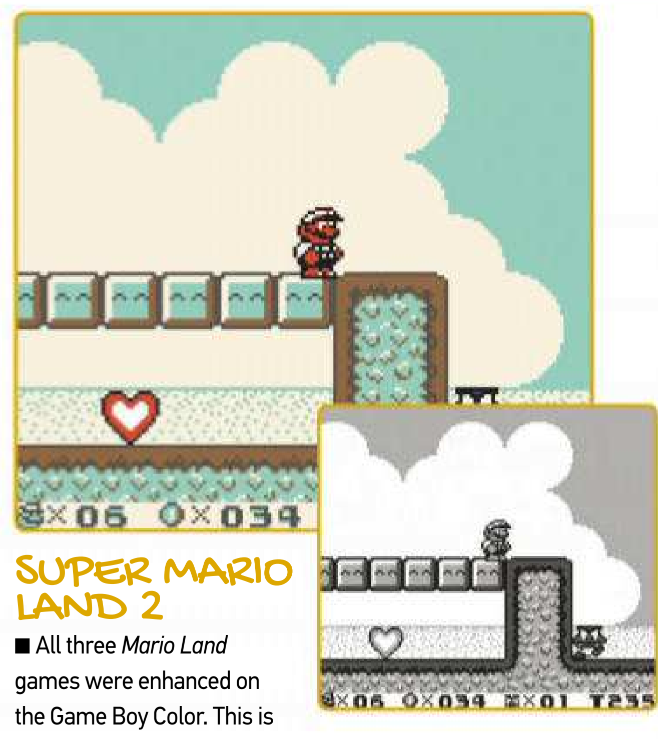
Audio was one element that Nintendo overlooked, with the Game Boy Color retaining the four-channel stereo sound from the original device. "Honestly the audio was the biggest drawback," says Mike. "We had enough power to deliver some pretty convincing digital samples, and mix that with pure sound generation, but it took a big chunk of the processing per frame and an even larger chunk of cartridge space. Writing a flexible graphics system and bank-switching architecture was a challenge, too. We had to learn how to do things the hard way, by reverse engineering it. Nintendo provided nearly nothing in the way of support."



» [Game Boy Color] *Wario Land II* was originally designed for the original GB, but the fantastic third game, seen here, was a dedicated GBC title.

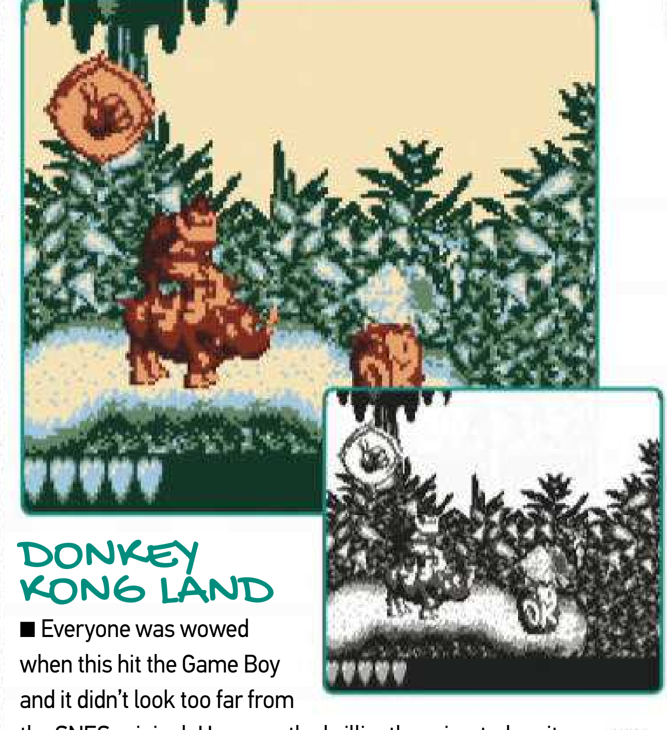


» *GB Action* magazine went big with its colour Game Boy 'reveal', a mere six years before the handheld actually arrived.



SUPER MARIO LAND 2

■ All three *Mario Land* games were enhanced on the Game Boy Color. This is the best of bunch, as the pastel-coloured palette lends itself well to the game's breezy levels. Okay so the coins are not golden, and Mario's wardrobe is a bit wrong, but we're happy to let that slide.



DONKEY KONG LAND

■ Everyone was wowed when this hit the Game Boy and it didn't look too far from the SNES original. However the brilliantly-animated sprites were often lost in the busy backgrounds. By simply colouring the sprites the problem was fixed and the game is transformed.



Color handheld wars

How the three competing handhelds stacked up



GAME BOY COLOR

Released: 1998
CPU: 8-bit Sharp LR35902
RAM: 48Kb total
Display: 6.6cm size, 160×144 resolution
Colours: 56 from 32,768
Battery Life: 10hrs from 2xAA batteries



NEO GEO POCKET COLOR

Released: 1999
CPU: 16-bit Toshiba TLCS-900
RAM: 16Kb total
Display: 6.8cm size, 160×152
Colours: 241 from 4,096
Battery Life: 40hrs from 2xAA batteries



WONDERSWAN COLOR

Released: 1998
CPU: 16-bit NEC V30
RAM: 64Kb total
Display: 7.4cm size, 224×144
Colours: 146 from 4,096
Battery Life: 20hrs from 1xAA battery

What Nintendo did provide was a portable platform that beat the most optimistic sales expectations. The Game Boy Color conquered the handheld space, easily brushing aside the Neo-Geo Pocket Color and the WonderSwan Color, and there was no threat yet from mobile phone gaming which was still stuck at *Snake*. Software sales were strong, too. Nintendo published games like *Pokémon* and *Zelda* dominated the charts, but licensed titles proved to be a cash cow for firms like Digital Eclipse. "Everything sold," says Mike. "There were just so many units out there and licensed games were selling huge numbers. We would literally get calls from publishers every week as this was a peak moment in movie-based games. Essentially GBC games were printing money. I was told *Tarzan* sold more copies than the N64 and PlayStation versions combined."

Tarzan was one of the first games to utilise the full power of the Game Boy Color and hence came



» [Game Boy Color] There were some surprisingly good 3D driving games released for the system, including *V-Rally* (pictured) and *Top Gear Pocket*.

Exclusives to treasure

Six classic GBC games that you won't find anywhere else (Virtual Console included)



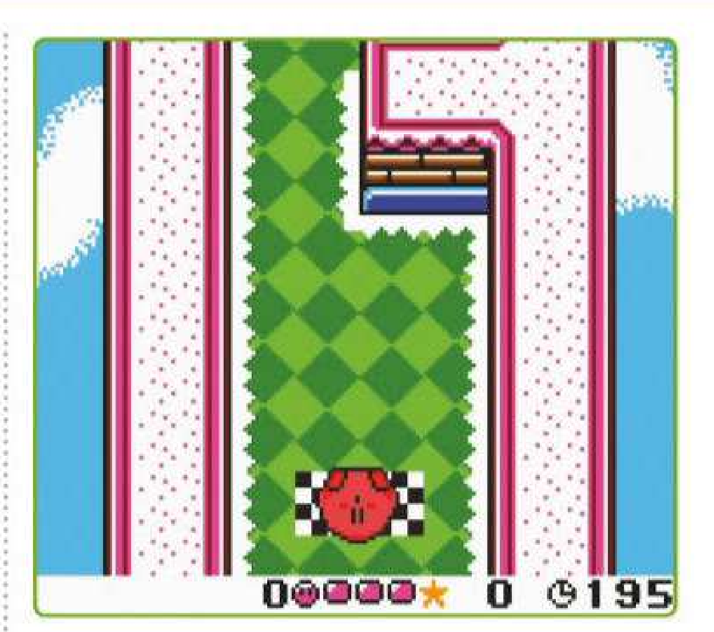
STRANDED KIDS 1999

■ It may look like a *Zelda* clone, but this is a unique, open-ended adventure where you have to survive on a desert island by foraging and crafting. It's utterly charming and captivating throughout. Followed by a sequel, and succeeded by the *Lost In Blue* series on Nintendo's DS and Wii.

POKÉMON PINBALL 1999

■ All of the Game Boy Color *Pokémon* games are on the 3DS Virtual Console bar this spin-off. This is possibly because the original cart includes rumble tech (that requires its own AAA battery). As portable pinball games go it's one of the best, rivalling the classic *Kirby's Pinball Land*.





KIRBY TILT 'N' TUMBLE 2000

■ Another title that included built-in tech, in this instance an accelerometer inside the cart. By tilting and jerking the Game Boy Color you guide our rotund friend around various courses, collecting stars. It's a riot, basically. This was never released in Europe, making it an import favourite.

> "It wasn't perfect, but man was it fun to develop for the GBC"
>
> Bob Baffy

on a clear cart. The first prominent GBC-only release was *Super Mario Bros Deluxe* in early 1999 and this set something of a precedent, with dual mode releases soon becoming the exception rather than the norm. This move was embraced by developers (and Nintendo too, no doubt), even though it was possible to harness the GBC's full capabilities with a dual mode release. "In order to support both platforms you were developing for the lowest common denominator," says Mike. "You basically colourised a Game Boy game and didn't do much more than that to keep production costs down. Our first GBC-only game was *Klax*. We showed Midway's CEO what it would be like using the full capabilities of the GBC, and then showed him the old black and white version. He didn't hesitate."

Bob adds: "I think Nintendo eventually started nudging folks to go with the Game Boy Color-only carts when they saw what a huge success the GBC became. Put simply, GBC-only games just looked a lot better than the dual ones, and Nintendo sold enough GBCs to justify dropping support for the original Game Boy."

Nintendo would eventually drop support for the Game Boy Color in 2003, four-and-a-half years after it debuted, during which time close to 600 games were released for the system. However it was superseded two years earlier with the arrival of the Game Boy Advance in 2001. This was the true successor to the Game Boy that brought 32-bit gaming to eager mitts. Once again Nintendo kept the previous generation alive by including support for Game Boy and GBC games. As such the GBC is a largely redundant piece of kit these days. If you want to revisit a GBC game then you'd be advised to play it on a GBA (specifically a GBA SP thanks to its backlit screen). Or you could play it on a TV using the Game Boy Player for the GameCube. Plus, many of the best GBC games, titles such as *Pokémon Crystal*, *Wario Land 3* and *Zelda: Oracle of Ages/Seasons*, are available on the Nintendo 3DS via the Virtual Console service.

The Game Boy Color may be obsolete but it's not forgotten – certainly not by the guys at Digital Eclipse who enjoyed the challenge of making it sing. "The technical limitations of the GBC sometimes made for better games," says Bob. "I've since worked on console and PC titles that had a lot less limitations but were less fun to develop because we weren't pushed to find creative solutions."

For Mike the Game Boy Color rekindled the bedroom coding ethic of the industry's early days. "In many respects it was like the old demo scene on the Commodore 64 and Amiga," he says. "For those making games on the GBC there was a subtext to our efforts. We were all trying to show off how far we could push it. If we introduced a full-motion video player, someone like Vicarious Visions would find a way to do it with hundreds of colours on screen, and then someone else would figure out how to do that with great sampled audio. We were all having a great time and we'd all hang out at events and show off our games as if we were at a demo scene meet-up."



He adds: "Most people who created Game Boy Color games were doing it to put off being part of much bigger teams where fighting for ideas was much harder. On the GBC you could still make a great game with one or two people and the development process was fast and unhindered. When I got into the industry, I thought I'd missed out on the heady days of small-team games. The GBC gave me a taste of that."

For the rest of us, the Game Boy Color gave us our first taste of colour gaming on a Nintendo handheld, and a flavour of what was to come with the Game Boy Advance. History may remember it as a stopgap with a short shelf life, but it was a neat device regardless that played host to some genuine classics. Above all it was a proud entry to the Game Boy Line that entertained gamers on the go for more than a decade. *

METAL GEAR SOLID 2000

■ Ignore the title. This is not an attempt to recreate the 3D majesty of the PlayStation game. Rather it's a return to the overhead 2D style of the MSX and NES titles, and its brand of stealthy gameplay works brilliantly on the Game Boy Color. Known in Japan as *Metal Gear: Ghost Babel*.





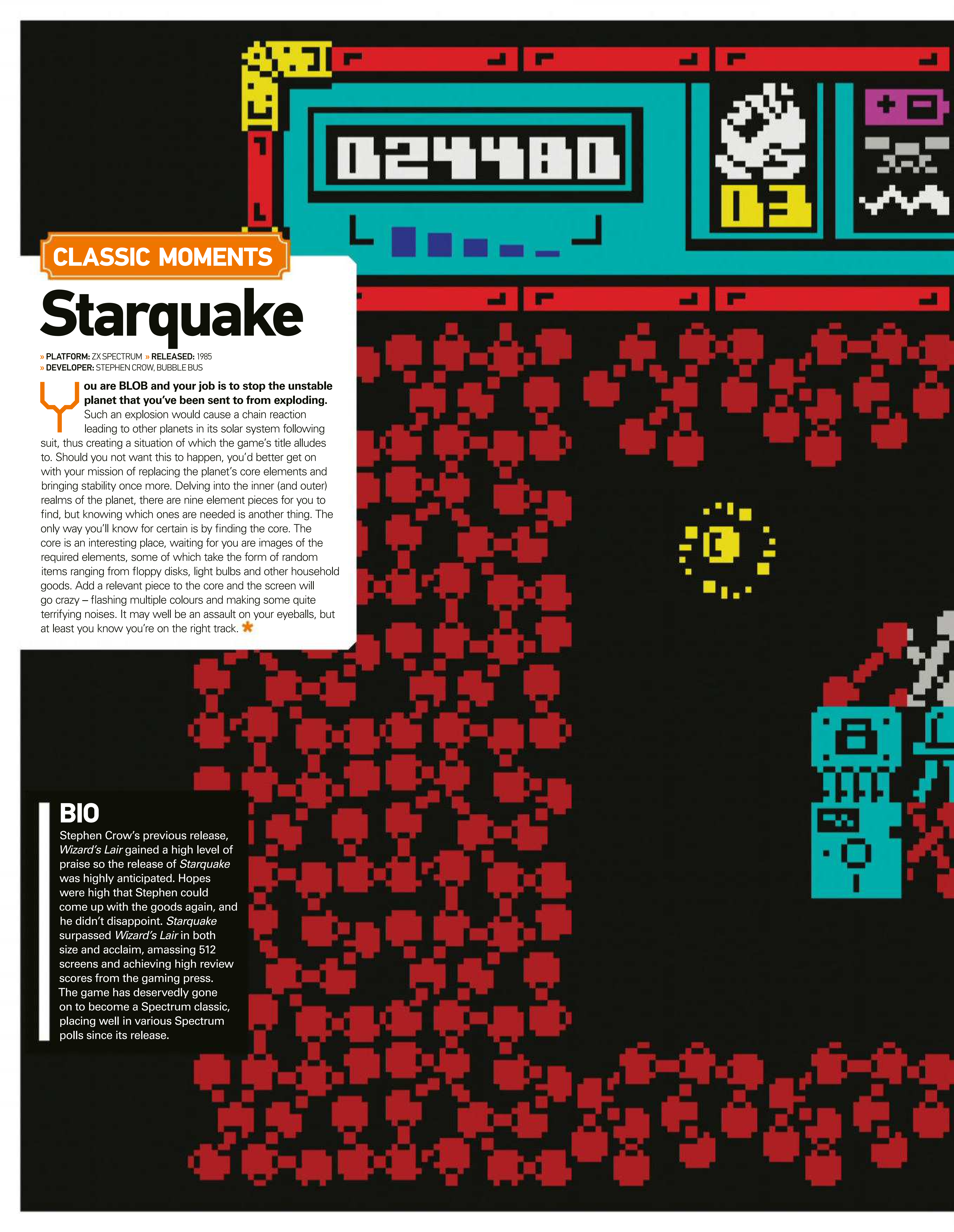
WARLOCKED 2000

■ Not a particularly well-known title, but one that fans of real-time strategy games should definitely seek out. You can happily waste hours playing this, making it perfect for long journeys. It's technically impressive too, with very little slowdown despite the complexity of the game.

WENDY: EVERY WITCH WAY 2001

■ Licensed didn't always mean lousy. This whimsical platformer, featuring Wendy the witch from the *Casper* series, features a gravity gimmick that transforms an ordinary game into an exceptional one. Creator Matt Bozon would follow this with the first entry in the *Shantae* series.





CLASSIC MOMENTS

Starquake

» **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM » **RELEASED:** 1985
» **DEVELOPER:** STEPHEN CROW, BUBBLE BUS

You are BLOB and your job is to stop the unstable planet that you've been sent to from exploding. Such an explosion would cause a chain reaction leading to other planets in its solar system following suit, thus creating a situation of which the game's title alludes to. Should you not want this to happen, you'd better get on with your mission of replacing the planet's core elements and bringing stability once more. Delving into the inner (and outer) realms of the planet, there are nine element pieces for you to find, but knowing which ones are needed is another thing. The only way you'll know for certain is by finding the core. The core is an interesting place, waiting for you are images of the required elements, some of which take the form of random items ranging from floppy disks, light bulbs and other household goods. Add a relevant piece to the core and the screen will go crazy – flashing multiple colours and making some quite terrifying noises. It may well be an assault on your eyeballs, but at least you know you're on the right track. *

BIO

Stephen Crow's previous release, *Wizard's Lair* gained a high level of praise so the release of *Starquake* was highly anticipated. Hopes were high that Stephen could come up with the goods again, and he didn't disappoint. *Starquake* surpassed *Wizard's Lair* in both size and acclaim, amassing 512 screens and achieving high review scores from the gaming press. The game has deservedly gone on to become a Spectrum classic, placing well in various Spectrum polls since its release.

MORE CLASSIC STARQUAKE MOMENTS

The Flying Pad

Whilst BLOB is no slouch when it comes to running, using the flying pad has its benefits. Not only does it keep you from the ground avoiding fatal spikes, it also allows you to move freely around each room. On top of this, you can also shoot in multiple directions allowing freedom to kill nasties wherever they may be. The downside is that whilst aboard you cannot collect any items, so you will need to dismount should you want to pick up core elements, objects or enter teleport stations.

Your Flexible Friend

The planet is a pretty open space, but wouldn't you know it – there are some places where someone has gone and installed security doors. Very inconvenient. Should you want to make your way past, you'll need a security card. Not only will it allow you access through these doors, it can also be used to access the Cheops Pyramids which you'll find around the planet. These are another valuable resource as they are used to trade unneeded core elements for required ones.

Olly The Octopus



We're not quite sure who Olly is, but you'll find him lurking in the lower realms of the planet not doing much but looking very confused. With an obscure look on his face and an oxygen mask, he is a bit of a mystery. Olly appears again should you wish to quit the game from the menu screen – after being asked if you're sure you want to quit you'll be told to, 'Say goodbye to Olly,' before your Spectrum resets to the home screen.

The Teleporters



Given the size of the planet you'll hope that there's something to help you get from one place to another. Well thankfully there is. Teleporters are here to help make your way around the vast landscape, all with their own unique code which will send you around the planet. Remembering all of the codes can be tricky – you'll either need a very good memory or if you want to go old school, how about you write them down on the game's inlay card?



THE MAKING OF GAUNTLET THE THIRD ENCOUNTER

With so many amazing coin-op conversions on Atari's Lynx it's easy to forget about some of the system's best exclusives. This sequel to one of the greatest ever arcade games is one such example

Words by Kieren Hawken

One of the most interesting factoids about *Gauntlet: The Third Encounter* is that it didn't actually start off life as a *Gauntlet* game at all. As part of the original lineup of games for the-then Epyx Handy, its provisional title was *Time Quests And Treasure Chests*. Once the hardware was acquired by Atari, and renamed the Lynx, the company started reviewing all of Epyx's games. It was decided that two games would be held back from launch, reworked slightly and given new names to make them more appealing, the other title being *Monster Demolition*, which would become an official conversion of *Rampage*. Designer and programmer Jon Leupp remembers how the development of the game started. "As I recall, at the very outset RJ Mical and Dave Needle had spelled out about six very different game types to launch with the game system so there would be a lot of diversity," he says. "I remember selecting a top-down scroller because I liked the design possibilities and because I had never made a game like that before. I played lots of *D&D* and was the Dungeon Master at Epyx, so it's fair to say I liked the fantasy theme, too. The funny thing is that I had designed the game to absolutely *not* be like *Gauntlet*, so there would be no issues of copyright infringement, and had spent months developing a game that was distinctly different. It was only a few weeks before we were wrapping things up that someone in marketing at Atari said, 'You know we could get the *Gauntlet* licence pretty inexpensively. How much work would it be to make it into a *Gauntlet* game?' My answer was that it would have saved me a whole lot of work if we had done that from the beginning because so many of the design elements would have already been established! I would have been very happy designing an actual *Gauntlet* game as I was a huge fan of the arcade game. I just wasn't thrilled with throwing a *Gauntlet* name on a game that clearly wasn't!"

The funny thing about this name change was that those who played it quickly picked up on the many differences between the original *Gauntlet* games and this new sequel. Although the press of the time liked it, garnering review scores of 82% in *The Games Machine* and 90% in *C&VG* for example, there were some people who were expecting the all-out action of the first two games and so felt disappointed by its more RPG-like approach. "Beyond changing the title, I added the Valkyrie character so there would be two *Gauntlet*-like characters in the game," Jon says, remembering the changes he had to make to the game. "The wizard was there from the start but didn't really look like the one in the original *Gauntlet*." The character selection in *Gauntlet 3* turned out to be vast, with double the amount of heroes to choose from compared to the first two outings. With such wacky avatars as a pirate, cowboy and a punk rocker it's certainly unique, too. "Basically, we just wanted to make a broad range of characters so that hopefully everyone could find one they actually liked!" Jon explains. "I do remember that we created a big list of character types and then whittled it down to the ones that seemed the most fun. The wizard was there from the beginning and made sense in this world that takes place in a castle. As I recall, the punk rocker chick was recommended by one of our female artists and appealed to our San Francisco sensibilities there in the late Eighties. The nerd just seemed funny to our group of nerds as a hero for a game. The Android was included partly because the game ends with space levels, you are seeking the star gem after all, and it tied in with the science fiction element."

One of the most interesting things about the last character Jon mentions is their resemblance to Google's own Android mascot. "Clearly they recognised the artistic brilliance of Paul Vernon and ripped us off!" he jokes. "Actually, I hadn't even noticed until you mentioned it. Maybe someone in marketing at Google was a big fan!"

Another very notable thing about Jon's *Gauntlet* when compared to the early lineup of Lynx games was that it was the very first game to be played with the console held vertically. Unlike other titles that use this mode, such as *Klax* and *Raiden*, there doesn't initially seem to be any advantage to this. "As I mentioned, we were trying to make a diverse set of games to launch with the device, and we wanted early to show off its various capabilities," Jon says, explaining its inclusion. "Playing a game vertically was something you just couldn't do on a home computer or console of the time, so we wanted to demonstrate that in one of our ▶



» [Lynx] There's a nice intro sequence that shows the magical star gem crashing into earth.

» Jon Leupp was the designer and programmer of *Gauntlet: The Third Encounter*.



» [Lynx] Like the previous two games, enemies attack in hordes.

> "I just wasn't thrilled with throwing a Gauntlet name on a game that clearly wasn't"
> Jon Leupp

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** Atari Corporation
» **DEVELOPER:** Epyx
» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PLATFORM:** Atari Lynx
» **PLATFORM:** Action adventure



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SUMMER GAMES II (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1985

ESCAPE FROM MONSTER MANOR
SYSTEM: 3DO
YEAR: 1993

NFL BLITZ
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1997





» [Lynx] So near, yet so far – that exit has clearly been put there to tease you.

THERE IS ANOTHER!

It's very unusual that you find two completely different sequels to the same game that, while sharing the same numeral, have almost nothing else in common, but that is certainly the case with *Gauntlet 3*. The year after Epyx and Atari released *Gauntlet: The Third Encounter* for the Lynx British software house US Gold published *Gauntlet III: The Final Quest*. Of course this title turned out to be very misleading as numerous sequels followed much later on. Having had such enormous success with its conversions of the first two games, the midlands-based developer was desperate for another game, so it grabbed the licence from Atari Games once again and created its own. It's a big departure from the first two entries, though, in several ways – most notably in the use of 3D isometric-style graphics. This means the action is far less intense and the focus becomes more about the adventuring side of things. It received a quite mixed reception from the press of the time because of this.

» [Lynx] The treasure might look tempting but remember you only have a limited inventory.

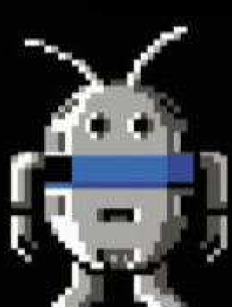
» [Lynx] Potions are a very important part of the game, so be careful not to shoot them by mistake.

> "We couldn't have even included multiplayer functionality with a less-advanced system than the Lynx" Jon Leupp

games. I also think the top scroller design had the least negative impact in the change from a vertical display layout." Other changes from the tried-and-tested *Gauntlet* formula in this title include an inventory system, meaning you can only hold a limited amount of items; new gear, such as scrolls that grant you special powers; computers that you can log into to purchase extra items using any treasure you collected; and an enhanced status panel that not only details the abilities and health of your current character, but also show any enemies that are approaching. In the older *Gauntlet* games the only items that you could save for later use were keys and magic potions, but in *The Third Encounter* anything you pick up is automatically added to your inventory. Pressing the B button on your Lynx brings up your inventory in the status window at the bottom of the screen and from here you can both browse and activate your pick-ups. Of course this inventory is limited, so you have to carefully consider what items are worth keeping and what aren't. One of the most important features retained by this third game was the multiplayer mode, allowing up to four of you to play at once over Comlynx. But adding this feature didn't go as smoothly as you might think, as Jon explains, "The final hardware was very advanced, [and] the prototype system we spent most of our time developing these first launch titles on was very primitive. The multiplayer functionality was particularly a headache. We were trying to send minimum packets of information between the devices but they invariably got out of sync so we ended up having to send the complete game state instead, so many thanks to Steve Landrum for working that out. Obviously, we couldn't have even included multiplayer functionality with a less advanced system than the Lynx."

Considering the quality of *Gauntlet: The Third Encounter* it's a great shame that this was both the first and last game that Jon had released for the Lynx. But he does reveal that he was working on another similarly themed title that was never finished. "I began work on an official *D&D* game for SSI but then Atari decided that it no longer wanted to develop any licensed products for the Lynx and cancelled it. Shortly after this I moved onto on to 3DO with many of my old Epyx compatriots." Jon is quick to follow this up with a tale of woe. "At the time of the first big CES show during development we wanted to demonstrate what the device was capable of, but our games were only rendering at one frame every few seconds so we had to generate scripts to play the games overnight while video capturing each frame," he says. "More than once I'd find in the morning that my script had sent the wizard into a corner

CHOOSE YOUR HERO!



ANDROID

■ While this robotic character is slow, it does have decent strength and by far the best firepower.



VALKYRIE

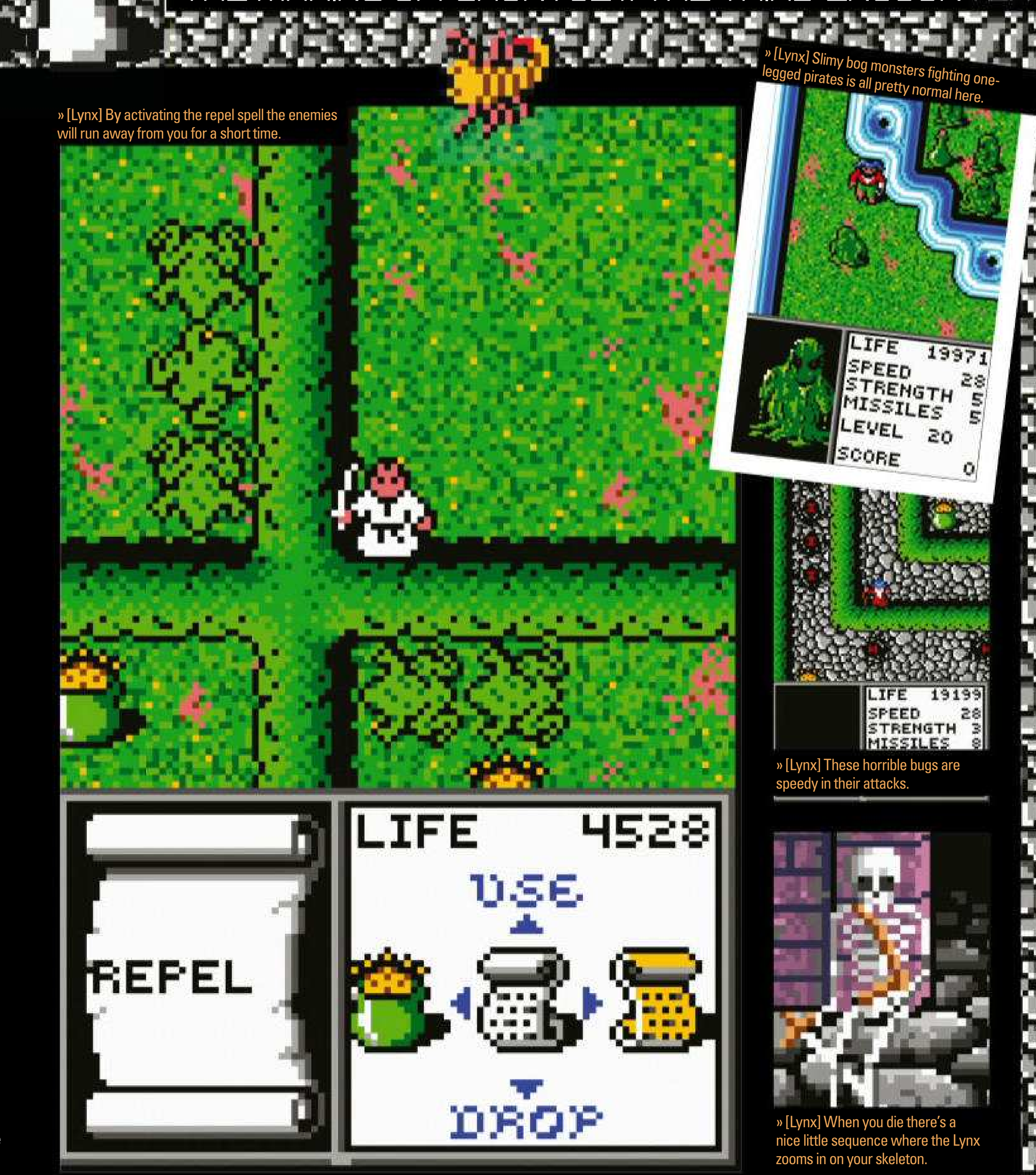
■ One of the heroes from the original game, Thyra's by far the fastest but doesn't offer much resistance.

where he got stuck and threw fireballs at a wall for three straight hours. When we got our first pass at burning to real chips the vertical axis had gotten reversed, so until we got that all sorted out we had to enter all of our art upside down!"

Jon starts laughing as he follows this up with another anecdote. "We had a name war going on during the early development of Lynx games at Epyx. Each of us was trying to outdo the others in how large we could print our name over our desk, but everyone else quit after I printed my name about three feet high! It did help that my name is only three letters though."

US Gold also released an alternative third entry in the *Gauntlet* series subtitled *The Final Quest*. "I wasn't [aware of this] actually, so I'll have to look that up and see how it compares," Jon says when we ask him if he knew about it. "The thing is I really never considered our game to be *Gauntlet 3*, as I already mentioned. I called it the *Third Encounter* to try to distinguish it from being the next in the series and to tie into the *Close Encounter* element with space aliens, so they are welcome to that credit!"

As a final thought, we ask Jon if he is pleased that his game is still so well remembered and highly-regarded by Atari Lynx owners. "Absolutely!" he says. "Although, quite frankly, I'm amazed anyone still remembers the Lynx at all or any of these games we wrote back then. Earlier you said that most people know the original name was *Time Quests And Treasure Chests* and I'd totally forgotten that, and I'm the one that named it! It was such an effort to get all of these first wave games done, often with only four hours of sleep per night, and I think we all wished we could have made them much better, so it's great to know that a lot of people enjoyed the results of our efforts." Jon left the videogames industry in 1997 after the demise of 3DO and moved across to developing slot machines instead, which he's continued to do right up to the present day, but he still regards those halcyon days at Epyx as his most favourite.



» [Lynx] By activating the repel spell the enemies will run away from you for a short time.

» [Lynx] Slimy bog monsters fighting one-legged pirates is all pretty normal here.

» [Lynx] These horrible bugs are speedy in their attacks.

» [Lynx] When you die there's a nice little sequence where the Lynx zooms in on your skeleton.



GUNFIGHTER

■ This Wild West hero isn't the strongest but has decent speed and puts up a damn good fight, too.



NERD

■ It's no surprise to learn this kid is useless, given his inclusion was very much as a joke.



PIRATE

■ This one-legged fellow is the best all-rounder of the eight being bang average in every skill.



PUNK ROCKER

■ By far the slowest playable character in the game and she only has average abilities elsewhere too.



SAMURAI

■ Perhaps the best pick in many ways as not only is he quick, he's also got decent defensive skills.



WIZARD

■ Another returning character from previous outings, this beardy spell slinger has a very high-powered attack.

The King Of Dragons

A GAME THAT'S GREAT FOR YOUR ELF



» ARCADE » 1991 » CAPCOM

One of the great things about growing up in Poole was that there was no shortage of arcades to visit. When I wasn't having to visit family or do homework, I would try and spend every waking hour of the weekend at Poole Quay Amusements and was just as happy to watch people enjoying the latest games as I was playing them myself. It's largely home to fruit machines today, but in the Eighties and Nineties it was a paradise for new games and I would try and experience as many of them as possible.

It was here that I first played *The King Of Dragons*, and it made quite a huge impression on me at the time. I have always enjoyed *Dungeons & Dragons,* and Capcom's game felt like an unofficial take on the franchise, which featured all my favourite monsters, including minotaurs, orcs and gigantic dragons. Hell, even the available characters are effectively standard character classes from the popular role-playing game. After depositing your credit you could choose between an elf, dwarf, fighter, mage and cleric, each with their own strengths and weaknesses and choice of weapons.

Capcom's scrolling beat-'em-up may have been generic in its approach and style but its reliance on copying well-known mythical monsters was pleasingly familiar to me. It also helped that it's a resoundingly solid fighter with challenging bosses, decent combat mechanics and a neat magic system activated by pressing both fire buttons together. The available characters all play differently to one another and the ability to play with two other players at the same time ensured you could create a nicely balanced party to take on all the fantasy critters that Capcom insisted on throwing at you.

Perhaps more importantly (at least from my point of view) Capcom's game set the groundwork for its superior *D&D* games, which took the levelling up system of *The King Of Dragons* and ran with it, delivering arguably two of the best examples of the genre in the process. That later success is arguably owed in part to *The King Of Dragons*, and its inclusion on Capcom's recent *Beat 'Em Up Collection* highlights just how entertaining it still remains to play today. ★


PLEASE
INSERT COIN


CLOUD
DEMON
BEHOLDER
STALACTITE
FLOATING HEAD
RED EYE
BRAIN
SNAIL

REAPER

GULL

ULTIMATE GUIDE: GYNOUG

One of the Mega Drive's earliest – and most bizarre – 2D shooters may not have spawned any sequels, but it has assured a place in gaming history for its strange menagerie of monsters. Retro Gamer descends into hell

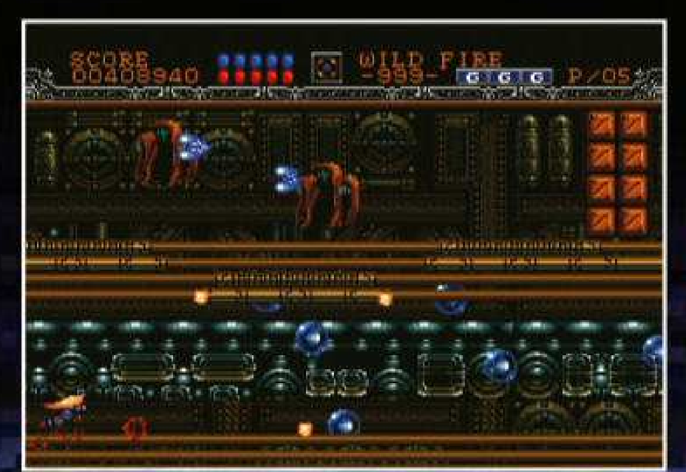
Words by Damien McFerran

GARGOYLE SNIPER

It's fair to say that *Gynoug* – known as *Wings Of Wor* in North America – came as something of a shock to Mega Drive owners back in 1991. While there had been the odd deviation from the perceived norm, most 2D shooters since the days of Taito's *Space Invaders* had placed the player in a heavily-armed spaceship and tasked them with bringing down hordes of bloodthirsty aliens (often riding in their own interstellar craft) in order to restore peace to the universe. *Gynoug* – which was developed by Masaya, a team which would become famous for titles such as *Cybernator* (known as *Assault Suits Valken* in Japan) and the popular *Shubibinman/Shockman* series – took a very different approach: you assumed the role of an angelic hero named Wor from the land of Iccus. When the tranquillity of this dreamlike world is shattered by the malevolent being known only as 'The Destroyer' and his band of grotesque demons begin to run riot, Wor has no option but to take to the skies and attempt to put a stop to the encroaching evil.

Set across five surprisingly long levels, *Gynoug* retains many of the genre tropes you'd expect from a scrolling shooter. Enemies attack in waves, with some firing projectiles in your direction, and bosses are present in two flavours: mid-level and end-of-level. However, *Gynoug*'s power-up system is pretty unique when compared to other games from the same period, by collecting coloured orbs you can drastically boost your chances of dealing with the seemingly endless flood of beastly foes. Blue orbs increase the rate of your shots while red ones make them more powerful. The current status of your shot speed and power is denoted by two meters at the top of the screen – shots max out at level five in both speed and strength, but several orbs are required to level up. Dying decreases these meters by one level each, so all is not totally lost if you meet you doom.

You can also alter the pattern of your shots by collecting coloured gems, which comes in handy when you're dealing with enemies that attack from both the front and the rear. These pick-ups come in three forms: a red gem gives you a powerful forward-facing shot, while a blue gem creates a pattern which fires straight ahead. Meanwhile, the yellow gem fires both forwards and backwards, although the rear shot is quite weak. Then there are the special attacks, which come in the



» [Mega Drive] The sprites of *Gynoug* might be small, but they're perfectly formed and full of detail.

HELLWORM

PINK HAND

DEATH BABY

BOSS RUSH

The devilish creatures you'll face off against



DRAGOON

■ This rocklike monster may look tough, but on his underside, you'll find tender flesh which is just begging to be shot at.

Keep low and most of Dragoon's shots will pass over your character. Keep firing at his fleshy weak spots to take him down.



PEEBLE

■ A serpentine monster with a human face, Peeble doesn't fire projectiles but prefers to dart around the screen.

Stay in the middle of the screen and pay attention to Peeble's off-screen dives. He darts around the screen in a clockwise pattern.



LOCOMOTIVE BREATH

■ An unholy combination of man and machine, this guy isn't going to let leaves on the track slow down his quest to utterly destroy you.

Keep to the left of the screen when the boss drops from the top, then concentrate your fire on the head while shifting to avoid incoming bullets.



GARK

■ Gark is basically a massive oven with a bad temper. He spews flame and conceals his weak spot behind a massive metal beard.

Watch out for red projectiles and keep an eye on Gark's mouth – not only is his weak point inside, he opens it to vomit fire in your direction.



SLOG

■ This floating humanoid has a pained expression and floats around in a cross-legged position. Relaxation isn't on his agenda.

Watch out for the blue projectiles Slog fires – if your bullets hit them, they'll split into more projectiles, keep moving in order to survive.





OGLITHAN

■ This floating mollusc waits for you halfway through the ocean level and surrounds itself with a hardened shell to avoid damage.

Watch out for the wide spray of projectiles as well as the shelllike missiles Oglithan releases from time to time.



MONOTROG

■ Part-machine, part-human, Monotrog is a devilish contraption made up of an airship and disembodied heads.

Stay in the middle of the screen and focus your fire on the flying machine while avoiding the projectiles and missiles flung your way.



PERFIDY

■ Perhaps the oddest-looking boss in any shmup ever, Perfidy has a body shaped exactly like a John Thomas. Poor fella.

One of the hardest bosses in the game, Perfidy hurls out loads of nippy projectiles – aim for the head and keep moving.



MASSEBOTH

■ Masseboth adopts two forms: his first is a sunken ship, but once this has been dispatched his true form reveals itself – a massive head.

There are a lot of projectiles to avoid during this fight, but as long as you keep your wits about you, you'll be fine.



ORRPUS

■ Totally limbless and attached to some horrific-looking pipework, Orrpus isn't having the best of days. No wonder he's in such a grump.

Avoid the red blood cells which fill the screen and make sure you hit Orrpus' floating heart when you get the chance – that's his weak spot.



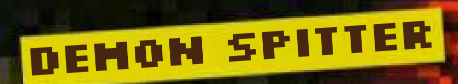
THE DESTROYER

■ The main bad guy is a rather pathetic figure, a shrivelled form twisted and bent by his own insane plans of domination.

The projectiles fired by this boss aren't fast, but they'll chase you around,so you need to keep moving while focusing your fire on its heart.







COFFIN DEMON

form of collectable scrolls. These consist of Energy Balls (projectiles that absorb enemy bullets), Lightning Bolts (vertical lightning attacks), Magic Arrows (homing missiles), Ground Attacks (land-hugging shots), Thunderbolts (the closest thing *Gynoug* has to a traditional, screen-clearing smart bomb), Wildfire (damage boost), Elemental (*Gradius*-style 'option' angels) and Aura Shields (no prizes for guessing what these do). There are also Feathers which boost your movement speed, all of which means you've got quite a lot to take in on your very first play – and we haven't even mentioned the ghoulish enemies yet.

Designed by Satoshi Nakai, the same artist who brought the equally disturbing denizens of *Cho Aniki* to life on the PC Engine, *Gynoug*'s cast of monsters is quite unlike anything you've seen in a shooter. A nightmarish melting pot of steampunk, medieval art and HR Gigeresque body horror, *Gynoug*'s bosses are some of the most distinctive pixel-based creations ever to grace a videogame. Things start off relatively tamely, with stage one's rock-like 'Dragoon' mid-boss and its bizarre man/train hybrid 'Locomotive Breath', and even stage two's end guardian 'Masseboth' – a giant with a sunken ship on his head – keeps things *relatively* calm, but by the time you hit the fourth level things get freaky. End boss Orrpus is a fusion of flesh and metal and has a look on his face that is so tortured you'll feel sorry for inflicting more pain on him.

As unnerving as it is to face off against a limbless floating corpse, level five's main guardian really takes the crown when it comes to *Gynoug*'s most twisted creation. Perfidy is a grotesquely deformed humanoid with blood running from his pale lips and what can only be described as a huge phallus forming the majority of his body. When asked by videogame journalist and erstwhile **Retro Gamer** staff writer John Szczepaniak about this suggestive design – which, lest we forget, made it into a videogame sold to youngsters – Nakai simply replied, "I drew that in secret, and slapped it in." How this got past Sega's gaze is anyone's guess. Perhaps its playtesters simply couldn't get that far in what is quite a tricky game to master. Penis-shaped monsters aside, that Nakai was capable of achieving this kind of detailed visual style during the Mega Drive's formative years



» [Mega Drive] You can't see it here, but this stage shudders and shakes around as if it's living, which looks incredibly impressive.

stands as a testament to his incredible talent. He's since gone freelance and has contributed illustration work to games like *Resident Evil: Code Veronica*, *World Of Warcraft* and *Culdcept*.

We've focused on *Gynoug*'s striking visuals quite heavily here, but the game has many other positive attributes that make it worth a play, even in 2018. The music – composed by Noriyuki Iwadare, who also created the stirring soundtracks for *Gleylancer* and *Langrisser/Warsong* – is perhaps a little basic for such an early Mega Drive release, but lends the game a suitably epic feel. Presentation isn't the only area in which *Gynoug* excels: the gameplay is challenging and this counted for a lot back in 1991, when many Mega Drive shooters were insultingly easy to complete.

Sega picked the game up for publication in Europe in 1992, where it retained not only the unusual name but also the iconic cover artwork, depicting the hero Wor holding a fist aloft in defiance of The Destroyer's evil forces. However, in North America it was third-party publisher DreamWorks, and not Sega, who had taken the plunge a year earlier. As we've established, it was renamed *Wings Of Wor*, but it also came with bespoke artwork by the legendary fantasy artist Boris Vallejo. While the art is arguably less fitting for the tone of the game, this fact alone makes the US release noteworthy: Peruvian painter Boris Vallejo has won numerous awards over the years and his distinctive style has graced everything from collectable trading cards to Hollywood movie posters. What does *Wings Of Wor* have in common with *National Lampoon's Vacation*? Boris Vallejo did covers for both.

While Masaya would go on to create the disturbingly brilliant *Cho Aniki* series – which featured vaguely erotic undertones and had a similar visual style – *Gynoug* remains to this very day a gloriously strange one-off. No sequel was ever forthcoming and the game has never been considered for a HD remaster. Perhaps its cast of nightmarish, deformed foes is simply too unnerving to consider unleashing them on the gaming public a second time.



» [Mega Drive] There's a selection of different special moves to use in *Gynoug* and some are far more effective than others.

PLAYING TIPS

How to defeat The Destroyer's legions

SPEED DEMON
■ Wor starts off quite sluggish, but by collecting Feather power-ups during your adventure you can boost his overall pace. Two Feather power-ups are enough to get the optimal speed, anything more and you may have trouble keeping Wor under control.

REAR GUARD
■ For most of the game, the Red or Blue gem shot patterns will suffice, but there are several moments where the Yellow gem – which gives you forward and rear firepower – makes all the difference. Thankfully, these gems usually appear exactly when they're needed.

SOMETHING SPECIAL
■ The special attack items each have a use, so you shouldn't ignore them – they can mean the difference between success and failure. For example, the Ground Attack spell is great for (you guessed it) dealing with land-based enemies.

WATCH AND LEARN
■ Some of the bosses in *Gynoug* are completely terrifying, largely because some of them occupy so much of the screen that it's hard to know where you are safe. However, like all good guardians they follow patterns, so keep your eyes open and look for the right moment to attack.

SHOOT THE CORE
■ Bosses have weak areas which you need to focus your fire on to take them down. Listen for the telltale 'boom' sound effect which denotes you're inflicting damage, as it's not always obvious where the weak spot actually is.

TAKE IT EASY
■ If you're finding the game hard, drop to the options screen, select 'Game Level', hold down 'A', 'B' and 'C' and then press 'Start' for an easier mode. You can also access a level select by holding down 'A' on 'Control' for ten seconds.





ATOMIC PLANET entertainment Ltd

Having already become firm industry veterans, Jason and Darren Falcus heralded the new millennium with a new startup company which they hoped would prove to be out-of-this-world. As a developer-for-hire, it had some great early success

Words by David Crookes



To survive the Nineties, studios not only needed talent but also wads of cash. It was, after all, a decade of huge change – a ten-year period that had swung from 8-bit computers to 64-bit consoles. If devs were not grappling with CD or 3D, they were seeking expensive licences. What's more, nothing could be taken for granted: who had really foreseen that Sony would smash the stranglehold which Nintendo and Sega had so long enjoyed?

Jason and Darren Falcus had seen this rapid growth first-hand. They were aged 18 and 19 when they launched Optimus Software in 1988, and they'd noted the rise of consoles. But, to capitalise on this flourishing market, they'd made a decision to go international, selling Optimus to Texas-based Iguana Entertainment in 1993 which, in turn was acquired by the New York giant Acclaim in 1995.

It's hard to say whether Optimus Software would have survived alone but with so many big names falling by the wayside during the Nineties, chances are it may have struggled to cope with the demands of the new gaming landscape. By selling, new opportunities presented themselves. "It was great to be part of a big international team of talented people and we made many friends during our time with Iguana and Acclaim, learning invaluable lessons about being part of a huge international publisher and developer," says Jason. Even so, by 2000, the Falcus brothers were confident in a more calmer environment to give the running of a games company another go.

"Towards the end of the Nineties, Acclaim had started to go through a difficult period and it had begun to make some layoffs," Jason says. "So while we'd enjoyed the opportunity to work on franchises such as *NBA Jam*, and develop original games based on licenses such as *Shadowman*, we missed being independent and being more in charge of the kind of games we worked on."

At first the brothers had discussed the possibility of buying their studio back from Acclaim. "But we didn't have the resources to do this, and to support such a large studio as an independent was too risky," Jason surmises. Instead, they left what was then-named Acclaim Studios Teeside in February 2000 and founded Atomic Planet Entertainment. "We agreed with Acclaim that we could employ anyone that was made redundant so we were able to quickly recruit around ten to 15 good people, some of whom we had worked with for a long time," Jason says. By May 2002, Acclaim Studios Teeside had closed but Atomic Planet was well into its stride.

"We accepted that we had to develop work-for-hire, but we wanted the opportunity to work on lots of platforms and genres," Jason says. We also wanted to get back to running a smaller team with more of a close-knit family feel." As such, the team started small, creating *DinoIsland* for mobiles in a deal with network operator Orange. Atomic Planet also made good use of the Falcus' relationship with Codemasters by signing a contract to develop *Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing*.

"Phone games were quicker to develop, and so *DinoIsland* was our first release," Jason explains. "We did develop two other phone games for Orange – *Blood And Sand* which was a strategy game based on Roman gladiators, and a dating game, but then Orange changed focus and moved away from developing and publishing phone games, hence the gap before our next release."



» [PS2] Atomic Planet worked with tons of licences, from Jackie Chan to Carol Vorderman.

» The studio was extremely diverse in what tech it could work with, including the ill-fated Gametrak device.

» *Jackie Chan Adventures* was a big recognisable brand that Atomic Planet got to work with.

TIMELINE

2000
- Atomic Planet Entertainment (APE) is founded by Darren and Jason Falcus with ten staff.
- *DinoIsland* is released following a deal with phone network Orange.

2002
- After 15 months of development, *Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing* is released.

2003
- Following the release of *Aero The Acro-Bat*, GBA titles *Zapper* and *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* hits the shops.
- Cinemaware's turn-based strategy game *Robin Hood: Defender Of The Crown* is converted to mobile phones.

2004
- Sales of more than 500,000 announced for *Mega Man Anniversary Collection.*
- *Dark Wind* is released containing a Gametrak motion-contolled device, gloves, footpad and game.
- Darran Falcus raises money for Entertainment Software Charity (ESC) by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.
- APE Game Store opens.

2005
- APE releases *SAS Anti-Terror Force, World War II: Soldier* and *Red Baron* in time for Christmas.

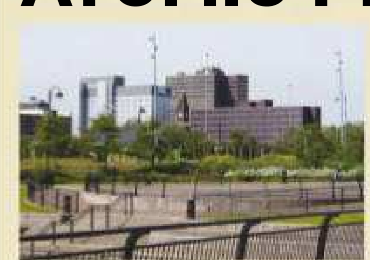
2006
- *Taito Legends 2* follows 2005's smash hit *Taito Legends.*

2007
- From *Carol Voderman's Sudoku* to *History Channel Great Battles Of Rome,* APE proves diverse.
- Darren Falcus climbs the Three Peaks for ESC.
- *Jenga World Tour, An Arctic Tale* and *Sea Monsters* are released.

2008
- In May, APE announces it is looking for producers, programmers and a technical manager.
- APE announces *Real Madrid Real Life* and *Stealth Force 2.* Both are canned.

2009
- The company works on the Wii minigames of *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars – The Director's Cut.*
- In March, APE announces it is in administration and no longer trading.

THE DNA OF ATOMIC PLANET



The Northeast

■ The Falcus brothers had built their careers in the Northeast. Optimus Software was based in Stockton-On-Tees, and Iguana moved the operation to Middlesbrough, only for Acclaim Studios Teeside to move it back. Atomic Planet Entertainment, however, was based in Middlesbrough, slap-bang in the centre of this post-industrial town on the south bank of the River Tees.



A Family Affair

■ "It was great working with both of my brothers: Darren, whom I had worked with since the Eighties, and our younger brother Matt who also joined Atomic Planet and became a shareholder," says Jason. The company also had strong relationships with other siblings, notably Codemasters' Darling brothers and the Oliver twins.



Industry Veterans

■ Atomic Planet worked with a host of big names. Among them were Charles Cecil (Atomic worked on *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars – The Director's Cut* in 2009) as well as Jon Hare. It also employed developers who had been in the industry for many years including Steve 'Snake' Palmer (who joined from SCI), and Dave Jones (not the DMA design one!).



Many licences

■ Whether it was working on games starring professional boxers and cartoon characters (Atomic made *Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing* and *Bob The Builder*) or working with National Geographic and The History Channel, Atomic Planet's games were usually recognisable titles such as *Family Feud*, *Jackie Chan Adventures*, *Charlotte's Web* and *Miami Vice*.



Can-do attitude

■ "We built up an amazing team, made lots of friends, worked on some really interesting projects, and had fun doing it," says Jason. And the fact they worked on so many games was down to the team's willingness to roll-up its sleeve and get on with whatever it was hired to produce. The developers worked across platforms and sometimes pushed boundaries: *Dark Wind* utilising the Gametrak peripheral being a case in point.



Mike Tyson Heavyweight Boxing was released in 2002 and it allowed players to assume the role of the famous boxer. The title played on the circus that tends to surround boxing matches, although thankfully it did not include some of the less savoury stuff that tended to follow Tyson around.

"We'd looked at all the boxing games at the time, and thought we could develop something which had more of an arcade look and feel and was more accessible," Jason explains. "We'd also worked closely with Jon Hare on the design." Jon, had, of course, made his name creating the football hit *Sensible Soccer*. "We also licensed several other boxers for the game and we were fairly pleased with the results, but the game could have benefitted from a little more time to balance the gameplay. "

Nevertheless, Atomic was up-and-running. By this stage it had assembled a team with lots of experience across all platforms including some old school developers. This worked in its favour, particularly when the opportunity came to develop GBA versions of games like *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*. "We were in a strong position to develop it due to the expertise of our team," Jason says. "We were very pleased with the end product, and this led on to repeat work from Capcom."



Other GBA games included Zap*per: One Wicked Cricket* which was a handheld port of a Blitz Games title, and *Aero The Acro-Bat*, again a port but this time of David Siller's Mega Drive and SNES platformer from 1993. "In the two or three years leading up to 2004, we had built up three main teams, and we were getting lots of work-for-hire projects for many large international clients," Jason says. "Some of the major projects which prompted this were *Jackie Chan Adventures* for Sony and *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* for Capcom."

For Jason, *Mega Man Anniversary Collection* was one of Atomic Planet's standout games. "Capcom approached us for this project because they knew we had our team with old school retro coding experience, and they required a faithful recreation of ten *Mega Man* games across the years from 8-bit NES to arcade platforms," explains Jason. It came at a time when Atomic Planet was literally banging out game after game. In 2003 it had developed *Superstar Dance Club* for PlayStation, *Sennari Darts* on mobile and *Robin Hood: Defender Of The Crown* for Xbox and PC. Its *Mega Man* collection appeared in 2004 alongside *Miami Vice* for PS2, Xbox and PC, and *The Guy Game* and *Jackie Chan Adventures* for PS2.

"Another game we were proud of at this time was *Dark Wind*, which was a first-person fighting game that launched with the Gametrak device," says Jason. "This was a groundbreaking device, devised way before the Wii, which tracked players' hands in real time and allowed them to immerse themselves in the game. We designed the launch game to go with it in which players actually threw punches towards their opponent and felt like they were in the fight. It never took off in a big way unfortunately due to the price, and due to the Wii launching at around the same time but it's still one of my favourite games that we developed."

Dark Wind showed the team's appetite for a challenge, and the number of games Atomic Planet was making meant more people had to



» [PS2] *Dark Wind* utilised the motion-controlled Gametrak peripheral, but it didn't impress.

> **"The Wii presented more platforms for us to develop on"**
> Jason Falcus

be recruited. The company's three core teams were each managed by a producer and leads in art, code and design. "We also had a core tech and tools team which produced our in-house 3D engine and game-building tools which were shared across all of our projects and allowed us to develop games more efficiently," says Jason. "Occasionally there were overlaps and shared resources which worked across multiple teams, especially on the art and animation."

Even so, 2005 produced a mixed bag of titles, including *Ultimate Pro Pinball*, the single-player shooter *Stealth Force: The War On Terror*, flight game *Red Baron*, first-person shooters *SAS Anti-Terror Force* and *WWII: Soldier*, and *Taito Legends* (the latter produced by working alongside Empire). There was even time for *Carol Vorderman's Sudoku*. "We didn't consciously specialise in a particular genre, but over the years we did develop a lot of retro-style games, and a lot of licensed third-person action adventures," Jason says.

If Atomic did specialise in anything, then it was low-budget titles which were challenging in the respect that the developer had limited time and resources. "Often the publisher would expect us to produce a game to the equivalent standard of something with three times the budget and double the development timescale," Jason says. "*Miami Vice* was one example of this – the result was quite a fun game but it was very difficult producing it under tight constraints."

Still, games such as *Family Feud* in 2006 along with *Taito Legends 2*, the FPS *Daemon Summoner* and *AMF Xtreme Bowling* kept Atomic Planet ticking along. That said, *Daemon Summoner*, a game set in Victorian London, was truly terrible. It's perhaps no surprise to learn that it was made in just three months.

That, however, can be the peril of a developer working for hire. "I regret not trying to produce more of our own IP more," laments Jason. "We tried it on a few occasions but if we had managed to get a large original game off the ground it could have changed our fortunes. Owning strong IP gives you so many more options." Thankfully, however, the Wii launched in 2006 which opened fresh doors for Atomic. Soon it was working on AMF Bowling Pinbusters for Nintendo's new console, along with *Jenga World Tour*, *Arctic Tale* and *Sea Monsters: A Prehistoric Adventure*.

"The Wii presented more platforms for us to develop on," says Jason. "We liked the Wii because of the increased creativity that the control system allowed us. Having worked on the Gametrak controller, we loved the idea. One of our biggest hits on the Wii was *AMF Bowling Pinbusters* which was developed for Zenimax." *Arctic Tale*, however, suffered mixed reviews while *Jenga World Tour* and *Sea Monsters: A Prehistoric Adventure* were poorly received.

By 2009, Atomic Planet was in trouble. It had to lay off 35 staff to cut costs and projects were being cancelled. "This was a terrible time for us – it's never easy laying off staff, and some of them we had worked with for ten to 15 years between Atomic Planet and Iguana/Acclaim and were good friends," Jason says. "Unfortunately it had to be done: the industry was changing, and we had some clients that couldn't pay us for work we had done. We had invested everything we had personally into the business, and it was a last resort to try to keep the studio running. Unfortunately it wasn't enough, and soon after this we ended up shutting the studio completely." *



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

The Falcus brothers after APE

■ After Atomic Planet Entertainment, both Darren and Jason reused the Iguana name of the company which had taken over their previous venture, Optimus Software, and launched a new studio in 2009. It closed after three years and the brothers moved to Team17 (Jason became head of studio – development, while Darren was senior business development manager). The pair left the publisher and formed Hippo Entertainment in 2013.

Jason Falcus

■ In 2013, seven months after joining Hippo Entertainment, Jason moved to Eutechnyx in Gateshead as executive producer. In 2014 he began working at Kwalee in Leamington Spa where he is chief operating officer for the independent developer founded by former Codemasters boss David Darling. He is overseeing the development and release of a large range of smartphone games such as *Go Fish!* and *Looper!* while encouraging small development teams to get in touch and submit games for Kwalee to consider publishing.

Darren Falcus

■ After Hippo, Darren became the CEO and Studio Manager of Spearhead Interactive. In March 2018, he became director of business development at Sock Monkey Studios in Middlesbrough. Founded in 2013, it works on console, mobile and VR games and its clients include Sega, Team17, Kwalee, Unilever, the NHS, Teeside University, Motorola and many, many more.



» Atomic Planet's work-for-hire approach to business landed it work with Carol Vorderman.



Retro Gamer Travels

LOST IN TRANSLATION

How the rest of the world experienced your favourite games



» [Mega Drive] Arnold Palmer's so famous, there's a drink named after him (it's iced tea mixed with lemonade).

OZAKI NAOMICHI NO SUPER MASTERS

FORMAT
Mega Drive

DEVELOPER
Sega

YEAR
1989

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest Of World

REASONS
Commercial



ECONOMY

■ One of the initial marketing strategies for the Mega Drive outside of Japan was a simple and timeless one – make a bunch of sports games and secure endorsements and licensing deals from recognisable faces and brands. In the console's early years, Sega released *Joe Montana Football, David Robinson's Supreme Court, James "Buster" Douglas Knockout Boxing, Tommy Lasorda Baseball* and *World Cup Italia 90*. Most of these were developed in the US or were unbranded Japanese games that had licensing slapped on afterwards.

However, one game in particular already had a licence – Naomichi Ozaki had lent his likeness to a golf game. Sega Of America made the decision to replace him with someone more recognisable, and got bona-fide superstar Arnold Palmer. In order to properly represent the game's new cover star, a number of the game's graphics were replaced. The title screen was completely redrawn, and the ending portrait was redrawn to include Arnold Palmer instead of Ozaki (it was also slightly increased in size). Additionally, Ozaki plays the role of your caddie in the original, but his portrait is removed outside of Japan. Interestingly, when converted to home computers, the Arnold Palmer title screen was simply modified to remove the celebrity likeness.

Those changes all make sense, but there are some others which are slightly harder to explain. The first is the removal of the staff roll at the end of the game. This sequence had some neat cameo appearances by Opa Opa and Alex Kidd as well as a bunny girl we don't recognise, so it's something of a shame to lose them in the international releases. Some subtle in-game credits do remain, as the golfers in the demo sequences use the names of the main developers.

There's also a relatively substantial addition for the Arnold Palmer version, in the form of a brand-new minigame. In the Japanese version, taking 100 shots without reaching the hole will trigger a screen with some crude drawings that basically tells you that it's helping you quit while you're ahead – in fact, you'll need to reset the console to start playing again. The export release replaces this with a game over screen, but if you enter a code (up, up, down, down, left, right, left, right, A) you will get to play a secret single-screen version of *Fantasy Zone*, in which the goal is to kill enemies without blowing up the bases.



» [Mega Drive] This is your reward for being really bad at the game in Japan.



» [Mega Drive] We got lucky here – the western Easter egg is way more fun than a rubbish drawing.

THE KING OF FIGHTERS '94

JPN ➔ ROW
Japan ➔ Rest of World

FORMAT
Neo-Geo

DEVELOPER
SNK

YEAR
1994

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
Rest Of World

REASONS
Sexual content, violence



ECONOMY

The Neo-Geo AES was famously capable of replicating the exact arcade experience at home, but it didn't always actually do so. *The King Of Fighters '94* is a great example of this, as certain animations were cut for non-Japanese audiences.

Mai Shiranui is the first victim of these cuts. If you play the game on a Japanese console, many of Mai's animations show her breasts bouncing as she moves. It's hard to miss this, as these include her standing sprites and her victory pose. If you're playing on an American or European console, she suddenly gains a highly effective but completely invisible sports bra which cuts all the movement out. This regional variation is exclusive to the console, as Mai's animations are the same worldwide in the arcade game.

The second noticeable cut concerns blood. On Japanese consoles, certain attacks gain a bit of a flourish in the form of a gush of blood – nothing compared to the buckets of ketchup in *Mortal Kombat*, but noticeable. Non-Japanese consoles won't display this at all. In arcades, the choice of whether or not to display blood was given to the operator.



» [Neo-Geo] In the rest of the world, they just cause a generic impact animation.

» [Neo-Geo] Choi Bounge often causes blood loss with his vicious metal claws – at least in Japan.

KINNIKUMAN: MUSCLE TAG MATCH

JPN ➔ USA
Japan ➔ USA

FORMAT
NES

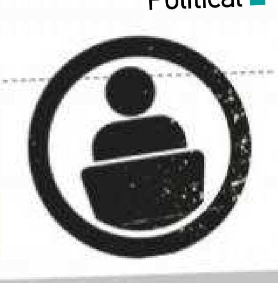
DEVELOPER
TOSE

YEAR
1985

ORIGIN
Japan

LOCALISED FOR
USA

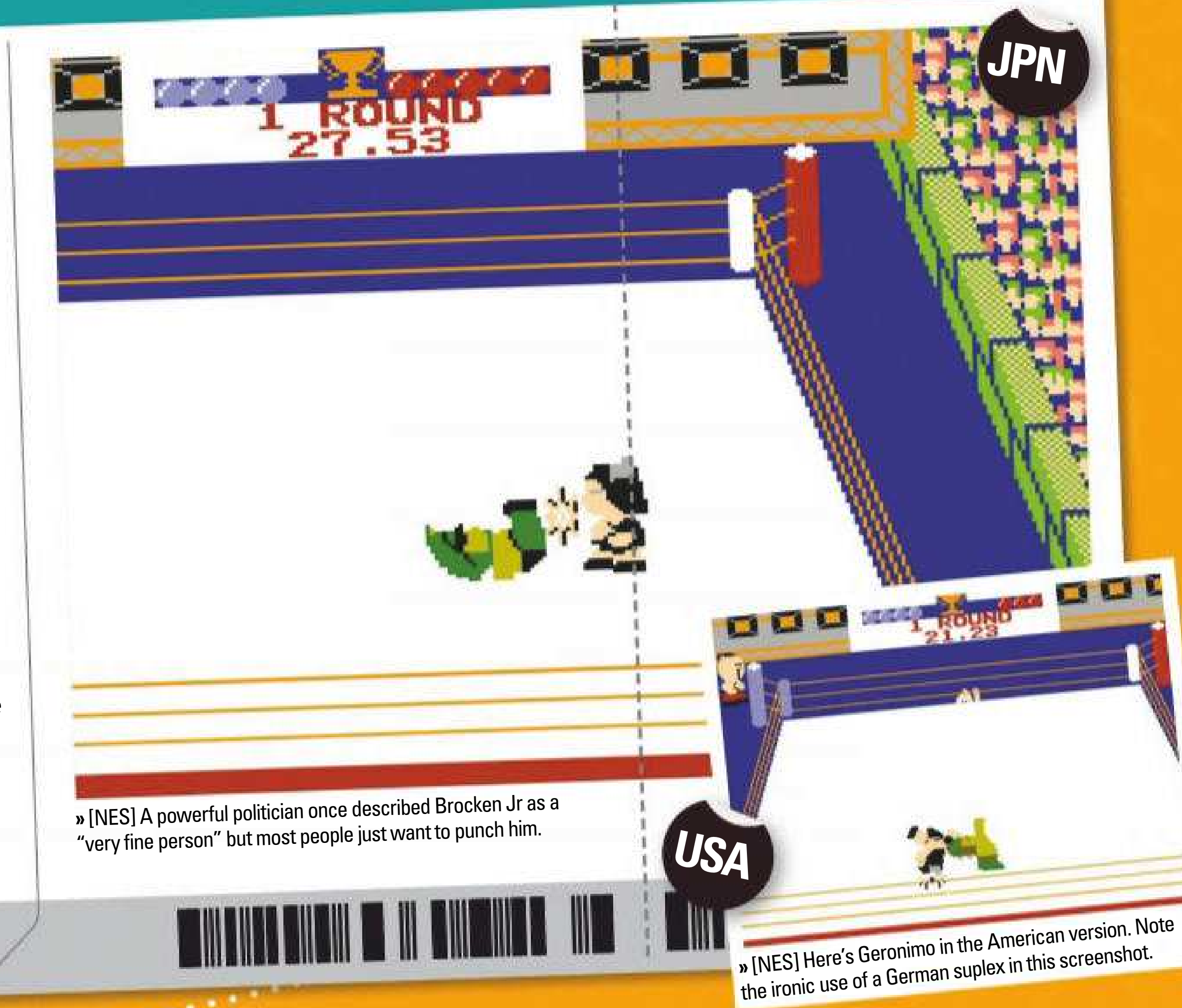
REASONS
Political



ECONOMY

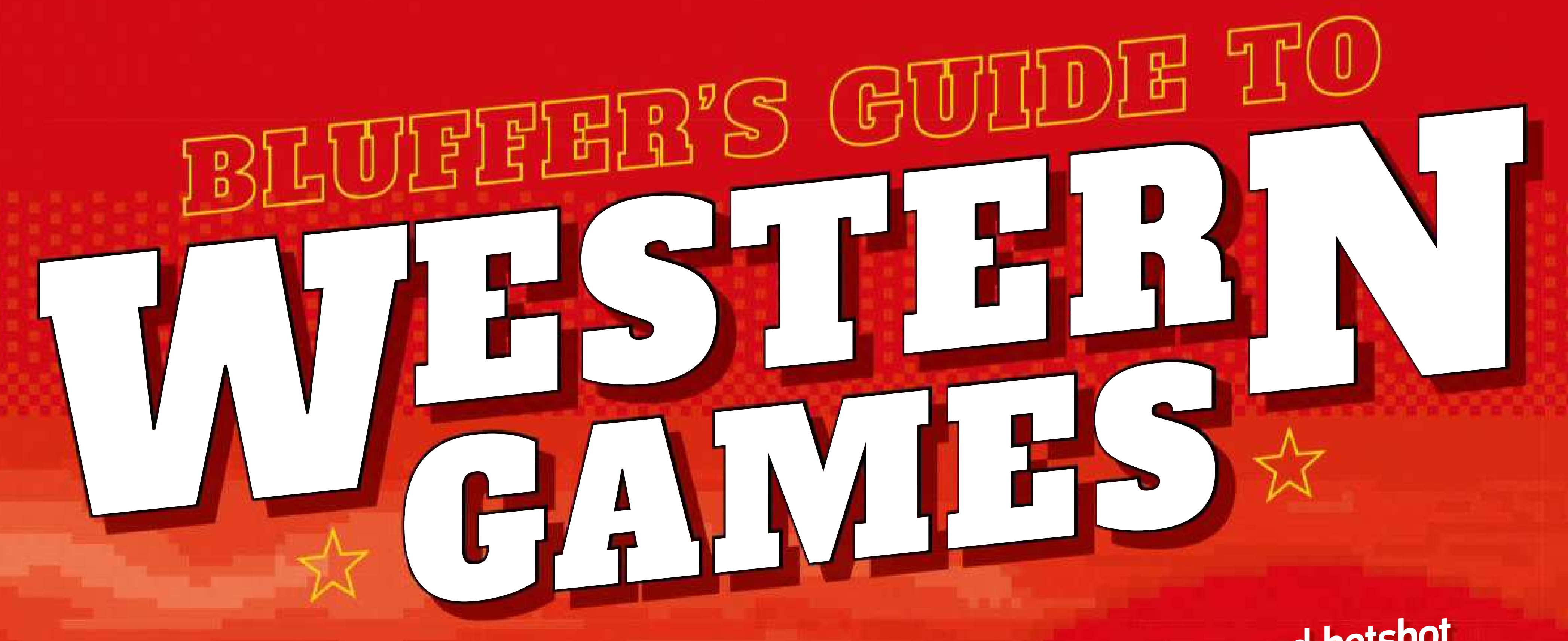
Wrestling is full of outlandish character gimmicks, from backwater cult leaders to clueless fashion police. However, portraying an explicitly political character is always a sure way to upset at least some portion of your audience. This is especially true when it comes to Nazi symbolism – just ask former WWE wrestler John 'Bradshaw' Layfield, who lost his job at news channel CNBC after trying to draw negative reactions by goose-stepping and giving Nazi salutes at an event in Munich.

So what is to be done with Brocken Jr, the explicitly Nazi-themed character in *Kinnikuman: Muscle Tag Match*? Although he wasn't openly displaying swastikas on his arms as he did in other Kinnikuman media, mostly due to the fact that the 8-bit hardware couldn't manage that level of detail, he still had to go. *M.U.S.C.L.E.*, the North American version of the game, replaced Brocken Jr with the Native American character Geronimo through a simple head-swap – they even share the same colour palette. We're not particularly convinced that beating up a heavily stereotyped indigenous person is a massive improvement, but the game didn't attract any controversy so the change did its job.



» [NES] A powerful politician once described Brocken Jr as a "very fine person" but most people just want to punch him.

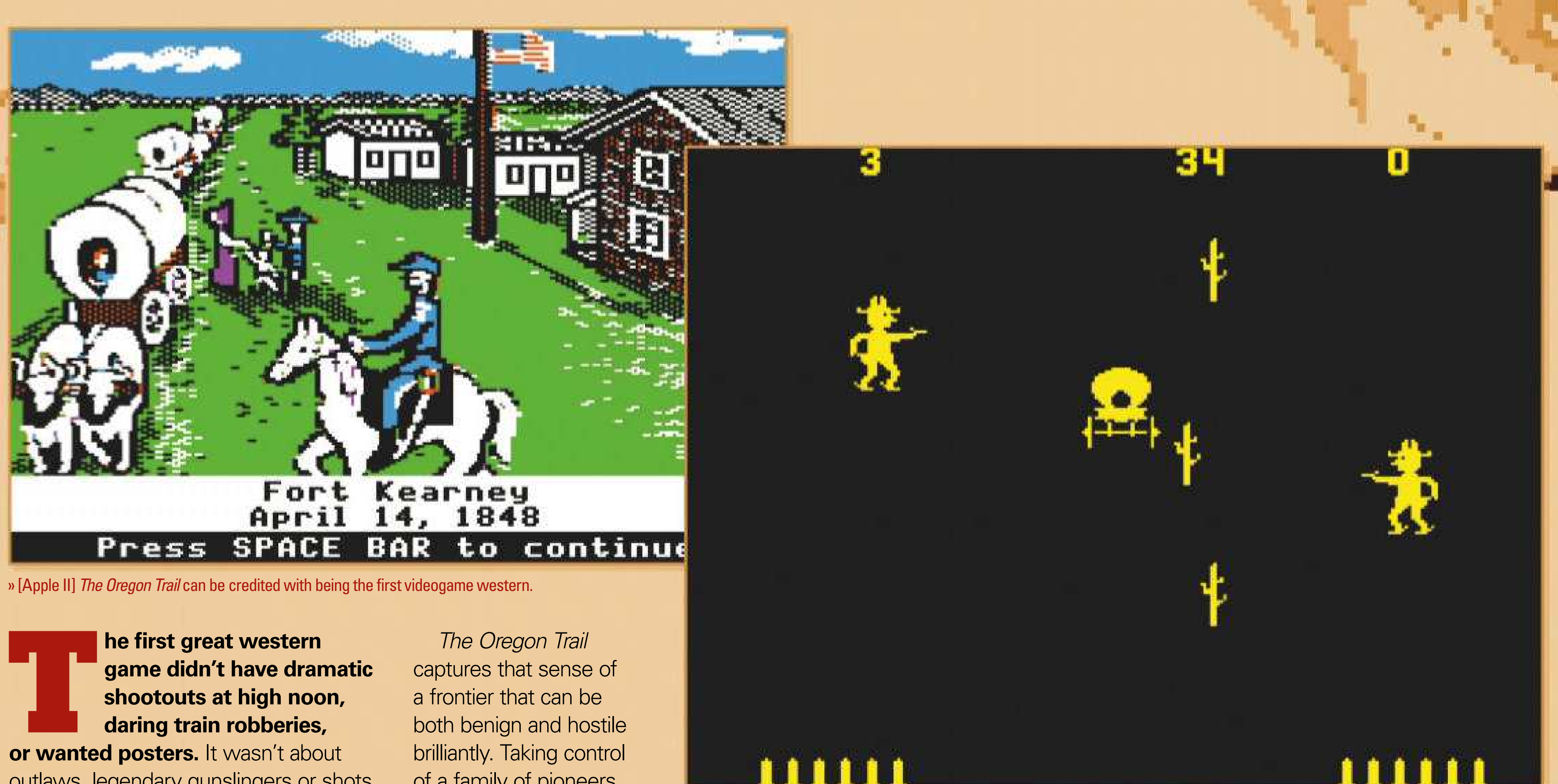
» [NES] Here's Geronimo in the American version. Note the ironic use of a German suplex in this screenshot.



BLUFFER'S GUIDE TO WESTERN GAMES

The Wild West is full of legends of outlaws and hotshot gunslingers; we pick out the Billy The Kids and Jesse James of the videogame world, from the first pioneers of the frontier, to the title that came to dominate it

Words by Paul Walker-Emig



» [Apple II] *The Oregon Trail* can be credited with being the first videogame western.

» [Arcade] Taito's 1975 hit *Gun Fight* was designed by Tomohiro Nishikado, who'd go on to create *Space Invaders*

The first great western game didn't have dramatic shootouts at high noon, daring train robberies, or wanted posters. It wasn't about outlaws, legendary gunslingers or shots of hard alcohol in saloons. However, what the first great videogame western, *The Oregon Trail*, did have, was an ability to evoke a strong sense of the unifying element that runs through every great western in one way or another.

"The concept of a 'frontier' is one of the key pillars of a western setting," says Blazej Krakowiak of CreativeForge, the developer behind tactical turn-based western *Hard West*. "While that can come in degrees and there's a great story to be told about the exact moment something stops being that frontier (*Red Dead Redemption*), most western stories work when that element is present. There's an element of survival, of pioneering, and nature is often both an enemy and an ally."



» [Atari 2600] *Outlaw* offered hours of multiplayer fun for anyone with an Atari 2600 and two joysticks.

The Oregon Trail captures that sense of a frontier that can be both benign and hostile brilliantly. Taking control of a family of pioneers making the journey west, you must manage your pace, rations and resources while dealing with sickness, injury, wagon breakdowns, bad weather and other semi-random events to try and reach your destination safely. The game was created by three teachers, Don Rawitsch, Bill Heinemann and Paul Dillenberger, as a means to teach their students about westward migration in the 19th century.

"Our goal was to provide students with a virtual experience, so that they could realise the hardships that the actual travellers endured," Paul explains. "Because the program relied on probabilities, each time they played, it was a different trip, as it was for the various different groups that actually travelled to Oregon."

"It was the first of its kind and best of any simulations at the time," says Bill, reflecting on the monster success of a game that was, fittingly for a game about the frontier, a true pioneer. "The feeling of being immersed in the game, making the decisions, and living with the consequences added the appeal," he continues. "The nice balance of feeling like you are in control but at the same time out of control."

The success of *The Oregon Trail* didn't spark a vogue for game's exploring the civilian experience of the western frontier. Instead, other western games that emerged in the late Seventies and Eighties tended to be drawn to the gunslinger aspect of the western. The established iconography of the genre meant that with a cowboy hat here and a wagon there, even simple graphics could evoke a scene that recalled the mythical battlegrounds of legendary sharpshooters given life in the popular consciousness through films like *The Good, The Bad And The Ugly* and *Butch Cassidy And The Sundance Kid*. In Blazej's words, "[The] Wild West is one of those iconic settings which doesn't need to be explained to the audience."

One of the most notable of those early shooters is 1975 arcade title *Western Gun*, also known as *Gun Fight* in the US. The game pits two cowboys against each other, the goal being to dodge the fire of your opponent while trying to hit them as you duel between the cacti and wagons that fill the space between you – incidentally, it's credited with being the first game to depict human-to-human combat. It's simple but fun design was followed up with *Boot Hill* in 1977 and copycat *Outlaw*, which released in the arcades in 1976 but is better known for its 1978 Atari 2600 port. The latter would have been many young people's first encounter with destructible environments, your shots able to take chunks out of the scenery between the two players.

There were several other shooters that used the Wild West as a theme in that early period. Nintendo's 1979 arcade title *Sheriff* saw you play as a sheriff surrounded by a gang

TIMELINE

1971

■ One of the first videogames and the first western is created: *The Oregon Trail*.

1975

■ **Multiplayer shootout simulator *Gun Fight* hits arcades, inspiring Atari 2600 classic *Outlaw*.**

1984

■ *Law Of The West* stakes a claim as the first western adventure game thanks to its tough-talking dialogue system.



1985

■ **The NES is released in the US, with lightgun shooter *Wild Gunman* as one of its launch titles.**

1990

■ Lightgun shooter *Mad Dog Mcree* hits the arcades with its standout live-action footage.

TIMELINE (CONT.)

1992
■ Konami brings its fantastic arcade run-and-gun *Sunset Riders* into the home with its Mega Drive port.

1994
■ American Laser Games releases the last of its lightgun westerns, turning its back on coin-on machines for good.

1995
■ *Alone In The Dark 3* takes a stab at bringing horror to the western genre.

1997
■ LucasArts FPS *Outlaws* releases, introducing some innovative ideas like a rifle scope and reloading.

2001
■ *Desperados: Wanted Dead Or Alive* brings a tactical edge to the Wild West, spawning two sequels.

2004
■ *Red Dead Revolver* releases to a lukewarm reception, but it would prove to be the launching pad for something much more impressive.



2006
■ The western genre's best-known first-person shooter series begins with the release of *Call Of Juarez*.

2009
■ *Call Of Juarez* gets a sequel that builds on some of the good ideas in the first game with *Bound In Blood*.

2010
■ *Red Dead Redemption* releases to critical acclaim, quickly gaining a reputation as one of gaming's greats.

2013
■ Techland makes a few well-judged adjustments to the *Call Of Juarez* formula and releases and underappreciated gem in *Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger*.

2018
■ The wait for the highly anticipated *Red Dead Redemption 2* comes to an end.

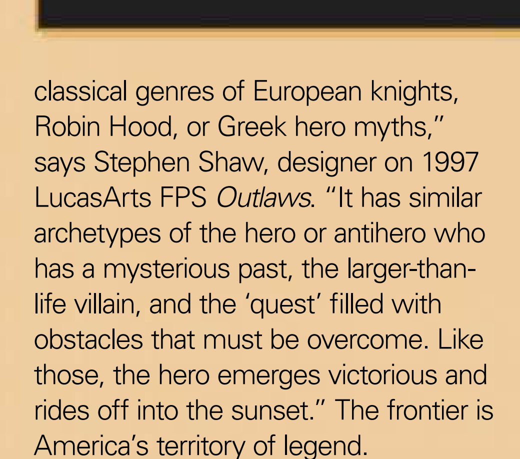
"IT'S THE AMERICAN VERSION OF THE CLASSICAL GENRES OF EUROPEAN KNIGHTS, ROBIN HOOD, OR GREEK HERO MYTHS"
Stephen Shaw

▶ of outlaws. It is notable for using dual-joystick controls, one for character movement and one for aiming and shooting, which although now standard, was unusual at the time. 1984 Commodore 64 shooter *High Noon* uses a similar setup, having you play as a sheriff taking out outlaws who are trying to shoot you down in between abducting woman from the local saloon and robbing the bank. The game features quick-draw bonus duels in between levels, aping the classic one on one quick-draw scene from classic westerns, which would go on to be a feature in many of the games we will be talking about later. *Bank Panic*, a 1984 arcade title later ported to the Sega Master System, was built around that very idea. As a sheriff protecting a bank, you cycle between 12 numbered doors and must quickly react to whoever comes through – it might be an innocent citizen dropping off cash, or an outlaw you must beat to the draw. *Kane*, released in 1986, also on the C64 and later ported to other platforms including ZX Spectrum and the Amstrad CPC, is another game that places you in the role of a sheriff, this time protecting the town of Kane. The game sought to capture different aspects of the western in its varied gameplay sections: shooting down birds with a bow and arrow for the wilderness survival aspect and horseback riding sections where you have to jump obstacles for the horseback skill we associate with the cowboy, for example.



» [C64] The positive aspect of a shootout in *High Noon* is that the local undertaker has plenty to busy himself with.

It's interesting to note that while the western is an American genre, indelibly associated with the landscape and mythology of that country, many of these early titles where actually developed outside the US. *Western Gun* and *Sheriff* were developed in Japan by Tatio and Nintendo, *Kane* and *High Noon* in the UK by Mastertronic and Ocean Software. This is a trend that would continue – Konami's fantastic run-and-gun shooter, *Sunset Riders*, came to the Mega Drive in 1992 and SNES in 1993, for example. Games we will touch on later such as *Gunfright*, *Call Of Juarez* and *Hard West* were developed in Europe. There's a universal appeal to the genre that holds a fascination for outsiders, despite its American heritage. "It's the American version of the classical genres of European knights, Robin Hood, or Greek hero myths," says Stephen Shaw, designer on 1997 LucasArts FPS *Outlaws*. "It has similar archetypes of the hero or antihero who has a mysterious past, the larger-than-life villain, and the 'quest' filled with obstacles that must be overcome. Like those, the hero emerges victorious and rides off into the sunset." The frontier is America's territory of legend.



The mythological status of the cool sharpshooting cowboy that roams that legendary territory surely accounts for the prevalence of western games that have tried to let us live that fantasy in a direct a way as possible through one of the great traditions of the western genre: the lightgun shooter. *Wild Gunman*, a 1974 mechanical arcade title that was later adapted to become a NES launch game in the US in 1985 is one of the early examples, emulating the archetypal showdown at high noon scenario with one-on-one quick-draw bouts that test your reaction speed.

American Laser Games produced a whole series of Wild West-themed lightgun games, kicked off in 1990 by the company's first hit, *Mad Dog McCree*. The game stood out thanks to its live-action video, filmed in New Mexico. You would visit classic Wild West locations like the saloon and bank, filled with outlaws for you to



» [Master System] Quick reactions are a must in the colourful Master System port of the arcade original, *Bank Panic*.



shoot down and topple amusingly from rooftops. The abundance of cliche and some dodgy acting gave the game a welcome sense of fun, almost like you're visiting a virtual western theme park. American Laser followed up on this with *Mad Dog II: The Lost Gold* in 1992 and *The Last Bounty Hunter, Fast Draw Showdown* and *Shootout At Old Tucson*, all released in 1994.

Konami got in on the act with *Lethal Enforcers II: Gun Fighters*, an arcade title that was also released on the Mega Drive and Sega CD in 1994. Characteristically of many games in the genre, it takes us through all the classic western scenarios: a bank heist, a train robbery, and so on. *Gunfighter: The Legend Of Jesse James*, a *Time Crisis*-style title released for the PlayStation in 2001 and its 2003 PS2 sequel made an attempt to revive the lightgun western, but, for now, that strand seems to have been resigned to the past.

» [C64] A bow and arrow is a common weapon in westerns, featured here in *Kane*'s entertaining hunting section.

» [Mega-CD] Ah, the classic tumble from the rooftop, one of the many pleasures of American Laser Games' *Mad Dog McCree*.



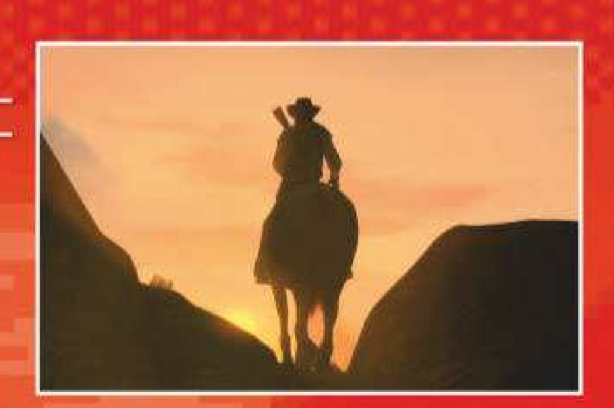
WANTED

The essential westerns worth corralling

RED DEAD REDEMPTION

PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360, 2010

■ Though its sequel may well eclipse it, no western videogame has enjoyed more commercial and critical success than *Red Dead Redemption* up to this point. It's beautiful but dangerous wilderness landscapes fulfil the moniker of 'Wild West' like no game before it. It's got epic train robberies, quick-draw duels, great characters, an amazing soundtrack, a fantastic story and everything else you could ever want from a western game.



CALL OF JUAREZ: GUNSLINGER

PC, PLAYSTAION 3, XBOX 360, 2013

■ This game brilliantly plays with the genre's mythologisation of legendary figures, having you play through the stories of an unreliable narrator that change before your eyes as he embellishes his tall tales. This innovative approach is backed up by some fantastic arcade-style, score-chasing shooting and cool quick-draw boss battle showdowns. It's an underappreciated classic of the genre.

KANE

VARIOUS, 1986

■ This game tries to capture all the elements that make a true cowboy: wilderness skills, riding horses and, of course, shooting outlaws. Playing as the sheriff of Kane, you are challenged with a series of scenarios: shooting down birds with a bow and arrow, avoiding obstacles while riding your horse and winning a shootout after getting ambushed in town. A sequel, *Kane 2*, was released in 1988.





SUNSET RIDERS

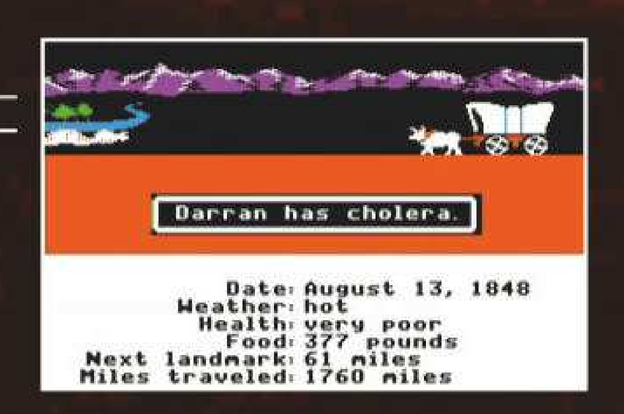
ARCADE, MEGA DRIVE, SNES, 1991

■ Originally released by Konami in arcades in 1991 before making its way to Mega Drive and SNES in the next two subsequent years, *Sunset Riders* is a game that showcases a Japanese take on the Wild West. It's a fast-paced and colourful side-scrolling shooter where you take control of either the revolver-wielding Billy or the shotgun-packing Cormano in one or two-player action.

THE OREGON TRAIL

VARIOUS, 1971

■ Proof that western videogames don't need to be full of gunfights and legendary outlaws to be successful, the mega edutainment hit that is *The Oregon Trail* tells the story of ordinary people making the difficult journey out to the west. Its brutal semi-random events brilliantly capture the unforgiving nature of the wilderness and produces some fantastic gameplay-driven stories.



Q&A WITH STEPHEN SHAW

We hit the saloon with the designer of Outlaws

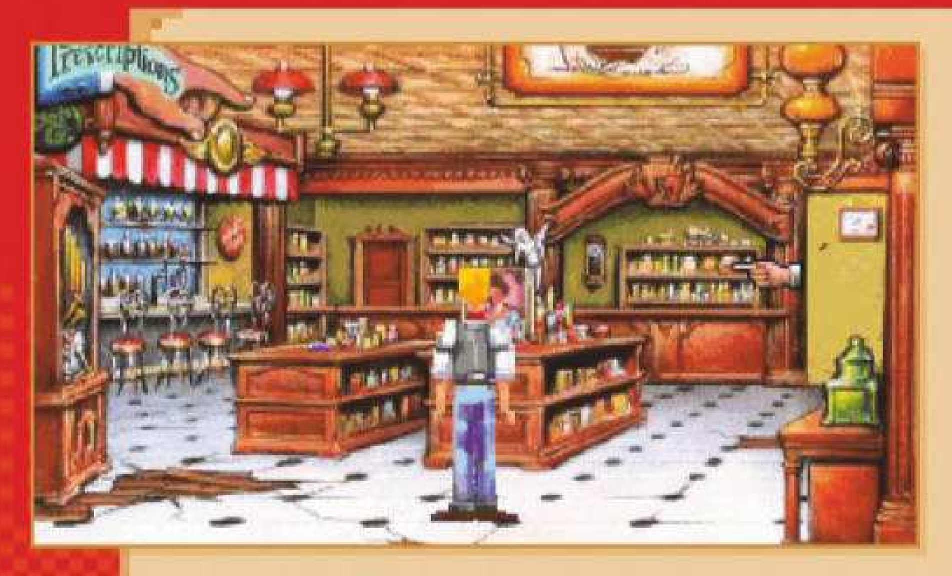
What were your inspirations when making *Outlaws*?
The prominent inspiration was the Sergio Leone westerns, but other classics were thrown in as well such as *High Noon*, and *Silverado*. Once we had a core team together, we went up to the media room of the Skywalker Ranch main house and spent the day watching westerns like *The Good, The bad And The Ugly*, *Once Upon A Time In The West*, etc. We would each call out elements we liked, and start brainstorming how we could make it work in a game given the technology of the time. It was so much fun, the room was acoustically isolated from the rest of the building so we cranked the volume up to the point you could feel the hoof beats, canons and gunshots. We were initially paranoid that the 'isolation' claim was not all it was sold to be, but we stepped outside the room and shut both the inner and outer doors, and could barely hear anything. Even though we had reserved the room, we kept envisioning George Lucas or one of his assistants busting in and demanding to know what the heck was going on!


» [PC] *Outlaws* features an enhanced version of the *Star Wars: Dark Forces* engine.

The game is often credited with being the first to feature a sniper zoom and one of the first to feature reloading. Can you tell us a bit about those innovations?
Reloading came about because of the way we wanted to establish the pace of the gameplay to match the genre and avoid ending up with *Doom* in the old west. You see it a lot of the films, the steely eyed Clint Eastwood shoots a couple of guys, and paces across an open street replacing the rounds in his gun with a watchful eye watching the roof tops, windows an alleys for an ambush.

How did the western theme influence the game's design?
While it was a vehicle for the game design, it was born out of a love of the Sergio Leone films and wanting to pay homage to it by bring that look, feel, and musical style to a new medium. All the elements of the game came from collective knowledge of the films and elements found there. Striking matches on your chin and throwing sticks of dynamite (Clint Eastwood Man With No Name films), the steel boiler plate 'body armour' (*A Fist Full Of Dollars*), exploding kegs of gunpowder, the list goes on. Easter egg here: the piano in the bars – the music is the same as the piano that plays when Ben Throttle kicks it in the 'Kick Stand' bar.


» [PC] The ability to reload guns was to help move *Outlaws* away from games like *Doom*.


» [PC] *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist* adopted a more lighthearted approach to the Old West.

We've established that the appeal of the western doesn't just lie in the gunfights. There's something about the world itself: the dusty towns, the morally grey people that populate them, the sunsets on open planes. From early on, there have been games that try to give us a taste of that world. 1985 ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and MSX title *Gunfright* gave you a small town to explore with residents to interact with as you hunt down and eliminate a gang of outlaws. *Gunfrights* contemporary, *Law Of The West*, 1993's *Freddy Pharkas: Frontier Pharmacist* and 1995's *Dust: A Tale Of The Wired West* went further in the adventure direction, focusing on dialogue options, story, characters, and, in the case of *Freddy Pharkas*, comedy.

These are far from the only western games to take the genre in directions that wouldn't necessarily spring to mind when you think of the Wild West. Marc Haessig, who led design on 2001 real-time tactics game *Desperadoes: Wanted Dead Or Alive*, explains that his team saw potential in taking a genre that tended to be dominated by

» [PC] Strategy isn't something that springs to mind when you think of the Wild West, but *Desperadoes: Wanted Dead Or Alive* has spawned two sequels, so clearly it worked.



INTO THE SUNSET What makes a great western game?

EPIC LANDSCAPES
■ A frontier that feels wild, dangerous and untamed and can inspire awe with its beauty as we explore it.

MUSIC
■ The western is tied with Ennio Morricone's film scores. A few western games have done a great job of emulating that sound.

CLICHE
■ 'Cliche' is much maligned, but if we're playing a western, we want to see those cowboy hats and hear those spurs jangle with each footstep.



FAMOUS SCENES
■ Chases on horseback, robberies, train heists, shootouts and all the other famous scenes we know from movies are replicated in videogames.

GUNSLINGING
■ A good shooting system and a cool slo-mo quick-draw mechanic as seen in *Call Of Juarez* and *Red Dead Redemption* goes a long way.

military themes into a western setting. "Characters would have more charisma and differentiate better from each other – as they don't need military uniforms – and dive into more colourful scenarios," Marc explains. "Military settings suggest a bunch of restrictions, such as discipline, respect for veterans and real victims, historical accuracy; the western setting was a call for freedom, room for something more fictional and fun.

"A nice thing about the setting was the typical western hero trope of a very fast gunslinger who can quickly defeat a bunch of foes," Marc says, reflecting on how the setting impacted on the game's design. "While trying to find a way to allow such an action, it triggered the idea of the Quick-Action mechanics that allowed you to coordinate actions amongst the gang."

» [PC] The Airbnb star ratings for *Alone In The Dark 3*'s Slaughter Gulch must be through the roof…

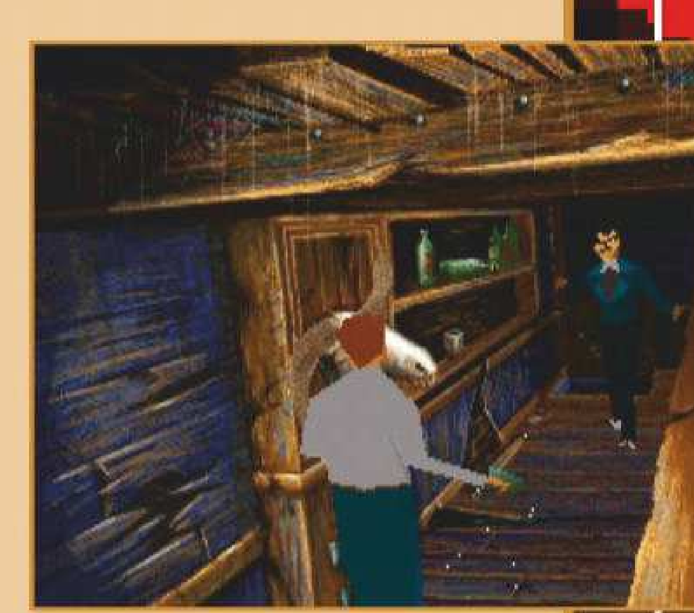
H*ard West,* described by Blazej as *"XCOM* with cowboys and demons", continued the tradition of the tactical western in 2015, again trying to capture the feeling of the Wild West through its mechanics, as well as its setting. "Several special skills in the game are derived from the legendary skills of gunslingers who could shoot quicker than their shadow and never miss," says Blazej. "The overall balance of combat in *Hard West* was inspired by the spaghetti westerns. The protagonists were almost superheroes compared to their opponents. That's why they were always outnumbered, with skills serving as the equaliser."

You'll note that *Hard West* blends demons with its western theme and if you look back through the history of the genre, you'll find that mixing the Wild West with horror is more common than you might think. *Alone In The Dark 3* brought its brand of survival horror westwards in 1994, Silverload is a graphic adventure western horror released in 1995 and *Darkwatch* is a 2005 Xbox and PS2 FPS that blends the Wild West with vampires and monsters.

> **"THE WESTERN SETTING WAS A CALL FOR FREEDOM, ROOM FOR SOMETHING MORE FICTIONAL AND FUN"**
> Marc Haessig

"It's worth noting that, at that time, there were very few pure western games and even fewer FPS titles, so it was hard to look at the marketplace and think a 'pure western' game would do well," says *Darkwatch* designer Brent Disbrow, explaining that there was a commercial as well as creative logic to blending western and vampire fiction.

"Another point," he continues. "FPS was a genre that, on consoles, had only recently had its breakthrough title in *Halo*. Given that the language you speak with in a first-person shooter is the guns, it's very difficult to say that historically accurate weaponry would be interesting or compelling enough on its own. Combine it with the supernatural, though, and you open the floodgates wide. From the design side, that was a hugely liberating benefit of mixing the source genres."



» [PC] *Alone In The Dark 3* is set in 1925, just after the Old West period, but you can still feel its influence.

" I WANTED TO CAPTURE THE ATMOSPHERE AND AS MANY ELEMENTS OF THE FILMS AS POSSIBLE"

Stephen Shaw

Still, the game maintained a strong Wild West identity. "Our weapon set, although more fantastic than historic, was loosely modelled on finding real western weapons and extending them into the Darkwatch organisation's technological/mystical realm," Brent tells us. "Our enemies used western archetypes as their leaping-off points for design. Our missions were very much referencing westerns – the opening train robbery, horse-riding mission, the fort assault. Again, we were looking at classic westerns and trying to spin them into new and interesting variants."

As we cast our eyes over the history of western videogames, a big surprise is that there aren't more FPS games, as compared to the many military shooters produced over the years. There have, however, been a few notable ones.



» [Xbox] Native Americans are sadly absent or misrepresented in many westerns such as *Gun*.

***Outlaws* was a 1997 shooter from LucasArts, built on the *Dark Forces* engine and using a cartoony western art style.** "Daron Stinnett had been brainstorming on what he wanted to do next after *Dark Forces* and was wanting to do a western in the vein of the Sergio Leone films," designer Stephen Shaw recalls. "We both agreed that we wanted to capture the atmosphere and as many elements of the films as possible. I bought some books on western films, several western 'history' books, *The BFI Companion To The Western*, *Ghost Towns Of The West*, which had a lot of good location ideas and photo reference, and probably the most important one *The Encyclopaedia of Western Lawmen & Outlaws*, which had about 500 pages of biographies of real life historical figures from the Old West," Stephen continues. "I spent weeks reading over their stories, exploits and how they met their end, cherry-picking bits and pieces that stood out from them to weave together the characters in *Outlaws*."

The game thought carefully about how its western theme should influence its mechanics, too. It was one of the first FPS games that required you to reload and implemented a stamina system to ensure a slower pace that more closely reflected the gunfights you'd see in classic western films.



» [Mega Drive] We never get tired of hearing the cry, "You ain't a gonna git me sheriff!" in *Lethal Enforcers 2*.

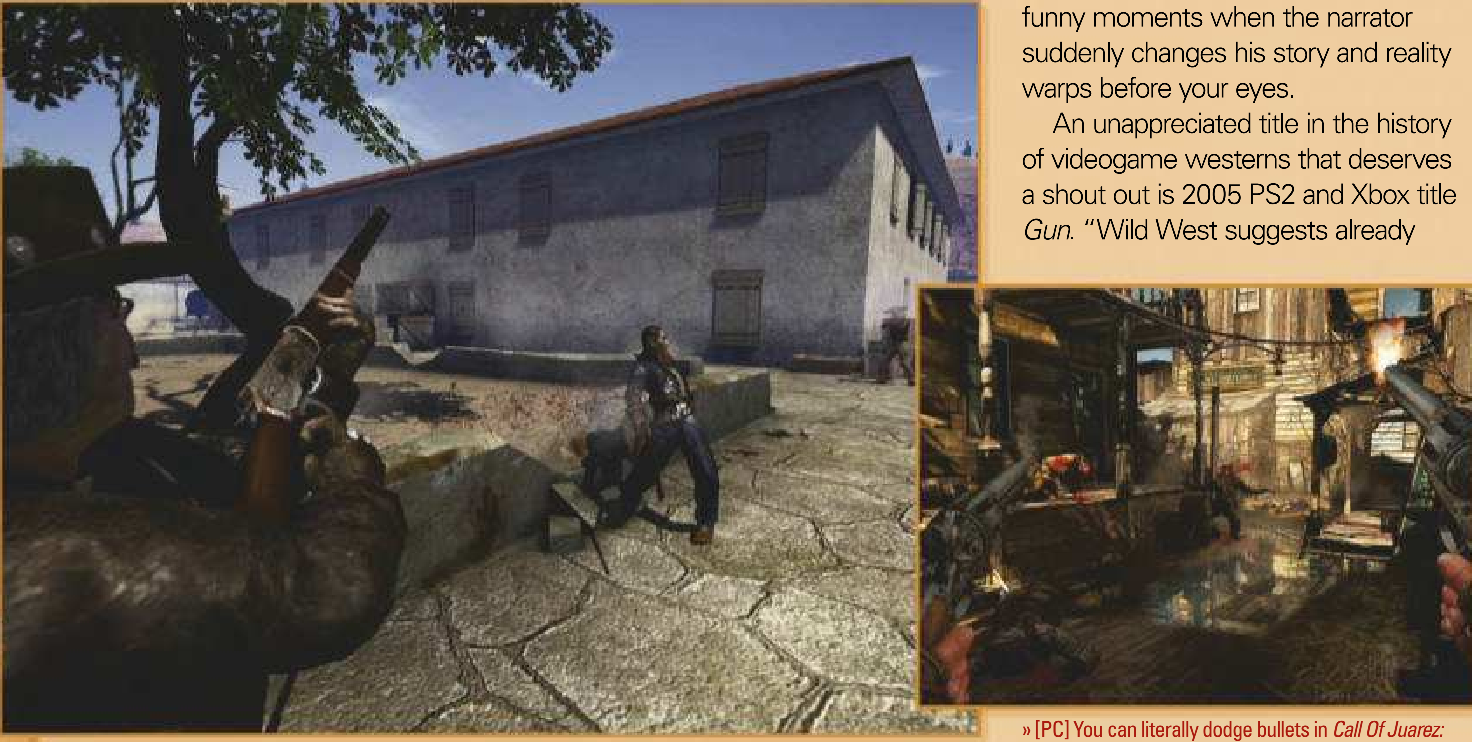
The other standout western FPS series is 2006's *Call Of Juarez*. You played as two characters: a vengeful preacher called Ray McCall and a young man falsely accused of murder called Billy. Alongside this concept of a story told from two perspectives, the game had a few cool ideas when it came to capturing the essence of the legendary gunslinger. A slow-motion mode allows you to gun down scores of enemies with the proficiency of a true sharpshooting legend and the game has a fun one-on-one quick-draw battle system.

Developer Techland followed up in 2009 with a well-received prequel, *Call of Juarez: Bound In Blood*, and a much maligned modern neo-western in 2011 called *Call Of Juarez: The Cartel*. The best in the series, however, is 2013's *Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger*. This entry shifted the series towards a more lighthearted tone and arcadey style, reminiscent of, but far better than, the lightgun shooters that populate the genre's history. As well as being a great shooter, the game's narrative structure is a stroke of genius: it follows the tall tales of an unreliable narrator, which provides a great excuse to jump between cool scenarios and legendary cowboys and leads to some funny moments when the narrator suddenly changes his story and reality warps before your eyes.

An unappreciated title in the history of videogame westerns that deserves a shout out is 2005 PS2 and Xbox title *Gun*. "Wild West suggests already by its words something exciting and adventurous," says Jean-Marc. "It triggers contrasting pictures of magnificent sunsets on wide spaces as well as shady saloons and mud. An interesting possibility of freedom, to be a hero or an outlaw, or even an outlaw hero." Through its *GTA*esque open world design, *Gun* was one of the first games to take a big step towards this picture of the Wild West – to embrace the freedom of the frontier in its design, to allow us to explore the wilderness, explore desert towns, or battle with outlaws.

Of course, one of the reasons *Gun* is not that well known today is that there is a game that did all that far better. The game that has eclipsed all other westerns: Rockstar's 2010 classic, *Red Dead Redemption*.

Rockstar's second stab at the Wild West after its decent 2004 third-person shooter, *Red Dead Revolver*, captured the spirit of the west like no game before it. It had dramatic sunsets and epic wilderness landscapes for you to explore as former outlaw John Marston. It had rough saloons and dusty towns filled with interesting characters. It recreated all the iconic scenarios you want in a western: train robberies, prison breaks and quick-draw showdowns. There was the fantastic soundtrack that could have been scored by the great composer of the western genre, Ennio Morricone. It



» [PC] *Call Of Juarez*'s two characters each have their own skills. Billy is stealthy, while Ray can soak up hits.

» [PC] You can literally dodge bullets in *Call Of Juarez: Gunslinger* – just of the game's many cool features.

offered moments of emotional poignancy – the moment you ride into Mexico is known as one of videogames' greatest scenes and the game's melancholy musings on the end of the frontier era packs a powerful punch. It was as if every western game had led to this point: it had the frontier feel and wildness of an *Oregon Trail* game, the cool gunslinging that was the focus of the lightgun westerns, and the epic homages to great western scenes that have been recreated in games like *Call Of Juarez*. It deserves its reputation as the best western videogame ever released. At least, it does for now.

Red Dead Redemption 2, which released on 26 October may eclipse the reputation of its predecessor. With this story of Arthur Morgan and the Van Der Linde gang, it looks as if Rockstar may again show its golden touch to surpass the first *Red Dead Redemption*. A new legend of the west may be born. *

» [PS3] Red Harlow uses his horse as a shield in one of many cinematic flourishes in *Red Dead Revolver*.



» [PS4] The Wild West can be a tough place to live and *Red Dead Redemption 2* doesn't shy away from that.

WEIRD WEST

Titles with a western theme that aren't true western games

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS

PC, PLAYSTATION 3, XBOX 360 2010

■ Obsidian's *Fallout* spinoff may take place in the post-apocalypse hundreds of years in the future, but it nonetheless has a strong western feel. Roaming the deserts of Nevada, you'll encounter all sorts of trouble, echoing the lawlessness of the Old West's wilderness. Then there's all the western paraphernalia, like revolvers, saloons and gambling.



ODDWORLD: STRANGER'S WRATH

VARIOUS, 2005

■ It may be set on a different planet and populated by all manner of strange creatures, but there's little more Wild West than playing as a bounty hunter capturing outlaws. This cowboy-inspired title is known for taking the bold step of making a major mechanical switch midway through and introducing a third-person perspective.

WILD GUNS

SNES, 1996

■ This SNES title mixes a western theme with sci-fi – you leap across the screen dodging fire from both bandits and robots. Despite having a small team and short development time, it's a great shooter with fantastic art. Today, a copy for the SNES will set you back enough for you to want to pull off a bank heist, however a remaster in the form of 2016's *Wild Guns Reloaded* is here to lend a helping hand.





BLOOD

PC, 1997

■ The occult themes are what prominently stand out in Monolith's fist-person shooter *Blood*, however the former cult member you play as – looking to get revenge on the dark god that he used to worship – is a resurrected gunslinger and there's a feeling of the Wild West lurking underneath the game's horror-focused locations. In that respect, it's similar to Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series.

WILD ARMS

PLAYSTATION, 1996

■ When you hear the Ennio Morricone-like music of *Wild Arms*' opening, you assume you're in the realm of the western. You sort of are, except this JRPG is set on a different planet and has magic and monsters mixed in with its Wild West motifs. Those who want to experience the world of *Wild Arms* will be able to soon, as its one of the games bundled into the PlayStation Classic mini console.





» PUSHING THE LIMITS

RoboCop 3

The 16-bit version of RoboCop 3 proved that movie adaptations needn't be one-dimensional

» **PLATFORM:** ATARI ST » **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL IMAGE DESIGN » **RELEASED:** 1991

Ocean scored a hit with its *RoboCop* tie-in, and it repeated the formula when it came to the games based on the movie sequels. *RoboCop 2* featured side-scrolling 'Robo on patrol' stages interspersed with token minigames, and *RoboCop 3* did exactly the same – or at least it did on consoles and 8-bit computers. It was quite a different story on the Atari ST, Amiga and PC however, where 2D Old Detroit became 3D Delta City.

This version of *RoboCop 3* was developed by Digital Image Design, which had previously developed flight sim *F29 Retaliator.* Studio director Martin Kenwright has revealed that the company was working on a 3D concept titled '*Mechadroid*' which they demoed to Ocean at the CES show in September 1990. Martin suggested that the robot in the game could become *RoboCop*, and the guys at Ocean went for it. *RoboCop 3* was released the following year, just in time for Christmas.

Like most movie adaptations, it was made up of sub-games based on the script. So there was a driving bit, a shooting bit, a flying bit and a fighting bit. But unlike other adaptations, this one was in full 3D. There were no sprites, just solid polygons, and it worked brilliantly. The opening driving scene, which saw Robo patrolling Delta City in his cruiser, was hugely impressive. The following on-foot section was even better, delivering basic but effective FPS thrills before the term was even coined. The flying and fighting scenes were less successful, but were still technically remarkable for the time. Unsurprisingly the title was raved about on release. Ed Ricketts of *ST Format* magazine awarded it 94%, saying: "*RoboCop 3* is perhaps the first example of what can really be done with a licence with some thought, time and programming excellence."

We've chosen to highlight the Atari ST version here because, like a few pure polygon games, it runs marginally faster and smoother than the Amiga version. Moreover, we like to champion the underdog when we can. We also like to celebrate that rare thing – a movie licence that's more enjoyable and inventive than the source material. This is by far the best product to carry the *RoboCop 3* name.



HOW IT PUSHED THE LIMITS. . .

Polygon Perfection

The 3D engine created for *F29 Retaliator* was updated for *RoboCop 3*, resulting in a fast and fluid experience. The designers claim they had to slow the walking sections to better match Robo's leaden pace.

Varied Play

Multiple gameplay styles are spread across the game's three floppy disks. Driving around Delta City is fun, but the scenes where you infiltrate buildings, capping baddies while avoiding hostages, are the highlight.

Slick Intermissions

The action is punctuated by Mediabreak bulletins which drive the plot forward. These intermissions are not quite Cinemaware-standard, but they add an extra amount of polish to the overall package.

Smart Samples

ST titles were often criticised for their weedy sound, but not this one. Samples from the movies are used throughout. In this introductory scene, ED-209 snarls and roars as it moves into position, just like in the film.

The making of The Getaway

We dig into the story of how a seemingly generic cancelled PlayStation title became an open world, gangster-filled, violence-fuelled, bloody tale of epic proportions

Words by Denis Murphy



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment
- » **DEVELOPER:** Team Soho
- » **RELEASED:** 2002
- » **PLATFORM:** Playstation 2
- » **PLATFORM:** Action

Chun Wah Kong, lead designer of *The Getaway,* always counted himself as lucky to be working on Team Soho's sweary third-person action game, but when scouting for locations in a lap dancing bar during office hours, he paused for a second and thought, "How did I get here where I'm being paid to do this?"

Long before *The Getaway* sold 3.5 million copies, became one of the PlayStation 2's most iconic titles, and Chun was sat in that bar pinching himself, the ambitious open world title started off as a prototype for the original PlayStation. However, with the PlayStation being at the tail end of its lifecycle and the warm shining light of the PS2's Emotion Engine on the horizon, the project – internally known as *Car 2* for Sony's 32-bit machine – was switched over to the PlayStation 2. But with the promise of a next-generation system came the chance to expand upon the original premise of *Car 2*. In speaking about the genesis of *The Getaway* in its PlayStation 2 incarnation, Chun explains, "Once we had settled with the basic getaway driver premise, I went about writing numerous scenarios and gameplay mechanics that would lend themselves to this theme. These ideas were quite self-contained, and we needed a way to string them together. I remember going for lunch with Brendan McNamara [*The Getaway*'s director] at Yo! Sushi on Poland Street, which was just round the corner from the office. We talked about injecting a cinematic feel into the game, and how it would be character driven. We wanted to turn it into an action movie with high-speed chases down London streets.

"It would be a tale of London's notorious gangs fighting over territory and power; it would be gritty, it would most certainly be an 18 certificate. To tell such a story, we would need photorealism: the characters, the cars, the streets, everything. We got back to the office and we laid all these ideas on the table and thrashed out a storyline that allowed for these individual scenarios to form a simple but coherent story arc."



"It really felt like anything was possible. You dreamt it, and it could be done"
Chun Wah Kong

With the PlayStation 2 dev kits en-route to the office, Team Soho was raring to go with its newfound game plan. Chun remembers the feeling of elation in the office. "It really felt like anything was possible. You dreamt it, and it could be done," he says. At its heart, *The Getaway* was naturally inspired by a slew of classic London-based gangster movies. Andrew Hamilton, graphic designer on the project, dishes out the films the PS2 classic took note of, "The biggest influence for *The Getaway* was Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock, And Two Smoking Barrels*. It had come out a couple of years previously and had made London and its criminal underworld cool again. It was definitely an influence in not only how we wanted to show London, but also in the graphic design for the game, and in turn the movies that influenced their style such as *Get Carter*, and *The Italian Job*. *The Long Good Friday* was another influence, as it's *the* British gangster movie!" The story of *The Getaway* is gritty, violent and stylish, and features two main storylines that intersected at various points. In the primary storyline, the player takes the role of Mark Hammond an ex-gangster who, ▶

Yasmin Speaks

Anna Edwards on her journey into a virtual life of crime

The Getaway was an amazing opportunity for me. Each of our voices were recorded over a period of a few months and then the motion capture process began. In order to carry out the intensive and driving scenes I went through extensive training with professionals – for example, I worked with Angelina Jolie's weapons trainer learning how to shoot! Working with director Brendan McNamara was a career highlight for me – he was so driven and visionary. After three years' of work it was finally time to promote our project – the media and gaming world were in a frenzied hunger as we travelled the world promoting the project – for me this included photoshoots and interviews, climaxing with the core cast performing in incredible locations around the world live to the media, including a disused warehouse, ship and prison! Most remarkably the whole *Getaway* process was a real-life adventure I had never, ever worked on anything as radical. To sum it up, when is a game not a game? When it's real! And it was a very real experience for me.

» Anna playing the role of Yasmin in a motion capture session.


» Hammond is in a spot of trouble in this promotional poster, one of many created by artist Julian Gibson.



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

THE GETAWAY
SYSTEM: PS2
YEAR: 2002

THE GETAWAY: BLACK MONDAY
SYSTEM: PS2
YEAR: 2016

PLAYSTATION VR WORLDS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PS VR
YEAR: 2016

after his wife is murdered and his child is kidnapped, becomes the grim errand boy of London's biggest gangster, Charlie Jolson. The second storyline that runs concurrent with Hammond's lets players assume the role of someone on the complete opposite side of the tracks, police officer Frank Carter.

Though Chun agrees with Andrew in terms of movie influences, he does offer up an additional source of inspiration that led to *The Getaway*, and perhaps one that many would not have imagined. "Around that time I had just finished playing the Japanese version of *Sonic Adventure* on the Dreamcast and I really loved the interwoven storylines," he remembers. "So from that came about the idea of different characters seeing the world from their own perspective and how they would interpret the same circumstances differently." Though the game does indeed feature two storylines that often cross over, the original plan for this *Sonic Adventure*-styled interweaving narrative was planned to be far more dynamic than it ultimately became. Chun continues, "In an early version of the design, as well as Mark and Frank, the player could also play as Susie, Yasmin and Harry. Some of these games would come before the main story timeline in the final game, eg: As Harry you would lead a small gang of Charlie's men around the city to collect debt and protection money. All this made for better character development, creating deeper character relationships, as well as a more varied gameplay experience. For instance, Susie was supposed to be a singer and her section was a rhythm game! It was a bit of a shame we drop these ideas, but all the extra work would've killed us."

In speaking about how he approached gameplay differences of Hammond and Carter, Chun says, "Looking back, perhaps they are not as different as I would have liked them to be and I relied too heavily on the NPCs' response to Mark and Frank to provide those nuances. So, for example, Mark's character can take hostages and use them as human shields. If the player manages to grab a high-ranking gangster, his footsoldiers would be ordered to surrender. Whereas if you grabbed a low-level thug, no one would care if he gets shot in the crossfire. Frank's character doesn't take hostages, instead he restrains them with cable tie handcuffs. Both characters had simple elements of teamplay with friendly NPCs, but Frank's character took this a step further when assisted by the specialist firearms SO19 unit."

Carter's story was unlocked once the player finished Hammond's set of 12 missions, and focused more on shootouts, whereas Hammond's playthrough had more driving. Designed to not be especially harder than the first playthrough, Chun says his goal for Carter's storyline was "a bit like *Ghouls N' Ghosts* when Arthur is going through the levels a second time with the Psycho Cannon weapon. It was fun without the difficulty."

One of the major selling points of The Getaway was its depiction of London, as instead of a city simply 'inspired' by London much like Liberty City in *GTA* is Rockstar Games' fictional version of New York City,

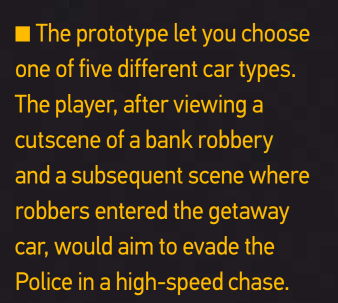


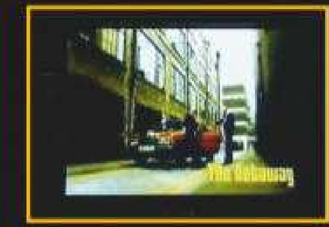
» Chun Wah Kong was lead designer of *The Getaway*.

> "I had just finished playing the Japanese version of Sonic Adventure on the Dreamcast and I really loved the interwoven storylines" — Chun Wah Kong

The 32-bit Getaway

Before The Getaway was ever a Playstation 2 title, it began life on the PlayStation



■ The prototype let you choose one of five different car types. The player, after viewing a cutscene of a bank robbery and a subsequent scene where robbers entered the getaway car, would aim to evade the Police in a high-speed chase.



■ At some point during the prototyping phase of what eventually became the PS2 classic, the game '*Car 2*' was renamed *The Getaway*, complete with the font that would be later used in the finished product.


■ Even at this stage, seeing *The Getaway* in action brings forward thoughts of Team Soho's other games. With that in mind, *The Getaway* can be seen as a natural progression from games like 1997's *Porsche Challenge*.


■ It wouldn't be a proper chase through a city without frantically driving through random cardboard boxes down an alley. This style of high-tempo gameplay found its way into the final product, albeit in a far more realistic fashion.


■ Though known as *Car 2*, most of the team simply called it 'Minis in a field'. Once the team decided to bring it to the PS2, it was to time to supercharge everything. Chun says, "No one was particularly excited by a game called *Car 2*."


■ The entirety of the PlayStation prototype is centred on London Bridge, which would lay the foundations for how Team Soho eventually recreated ten square miles of London for the final version of *The Getaway*.

» [PS2] In one of the more memorable missions, Hammond must drop a dead Triad gang member directly into the heart of Triad gangland.

» A lifelike recreation of *The Getaway*'s big bad: Charlie Jolson.



» Geared-up actors and technical staff preparing for a motion capture session.

the team painstakingly recreated a full ten square miles of London within the game. The process of recreating London began by carving the city into pieces and assigning territories to the four gangs of *The Getaway*: East End Gang, Yardies, Triads and Soho Gang. Detailing this process Chun says, "After we gave identities to the four gangs, we set about assigning their territories and finalising *The Getaway*'s world map. We started with the East End Gang in Bethnal Green and the Chinese Triads in Chinatown. A straight line from these two points on the map already measure over three miles in real life. And with the Soho Gang, the Jamaican Yardies Gang, the landmarks that had to be in the game to represent London, and other special level design requirements in place, the exterior world map started to take shape.

"We made sure we had covered the main road arteries between the different areas with denser back streets and shortcuts around the places of interest. I put it down to ambition and naivety for the size of world map. Additionally, road building tools were created and handled by a 3D package called Maya, with level designers making sure that the road widths, gradient, pavement type, markings and everything else were accurately recreated."

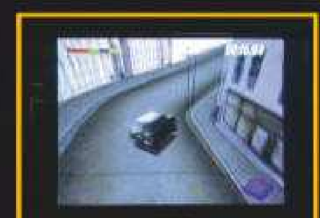
Beyond getting the outline and roads of London nailed down, the next step was arguably the most arduous. Armed with an early Sony Mavica digital camera that saved photographs on a clunky 3.5-inch floppy disc, which could barely hold one uncompressed image at a time, a team of artists descended upon London and snapped every iconic area and building they could, leading to a gigantic library of assets they could pull from when rebuilding the city within the game. The same artists also took images that could be used for realistic textures, which helped hit home a level of realism largely unseen on the PlayStation 2 until *The Getaway*. Furthermore, Stuart Harvey (level designer) braved the scrutiny of the great British public when he drove around the city with a DV camcorder strapped to the top of his car. The stunt did see him being pulled over by the police on several different occasions, but it did help the team successfully recreate authentic population density and footfall among London's busiest areas. Andrew hits home both the teams ambition and goal by saying, "One of the goals we wanted for *The Getaway* was for it to be a real London, it's where we lived and worked. *The Getaway* was one of the first, if not the first, game to faithfully recreate a city using photography, something that's pretty common these days, but back in 2000 hadn't ever been attempted."

Another standout element of *The Getaway* is its complete lack of HUD. Solely done for the purpose to help pull the player into the ongoing cinematic experience, how the team conveyed information to the player in a grounded and logical way was effective, daring and, even to this day, incredibly innovative. For instance, instead of a minimap that the player would follow during their many high-speed chases and escapes throughout London, flickering left and right indicators on the players car would simply turn on and off to direct the player in the direction of their objective. If a car was smashed up enough that the indicators were destroyed, the player had no option but to abandon their vehicle and find another one, unless they wanted to get lost among the streets of London. Additionally, changes in health status was also achieved purely by visuals, too. As the player received damage, blood would begin soaking through their clothes and down their faces as they slowly hunched over as they feebly attempted to walk or run. The only way to heal the character throughout the game was to have them lean against a wall as their caught their breath, which added to the sense of gritty realism that oozed from every pore of *The Getaway*.

"Ultimately, I think players appreciate these innovations and chances we took with the design ▶



■ Fitting with *The Getaway*'s cinematic inspirations, the initial Playstation version of game featured a Mini Cooper driving through the streets of London, making a call back to the classic British crime film *The Italian Job*.



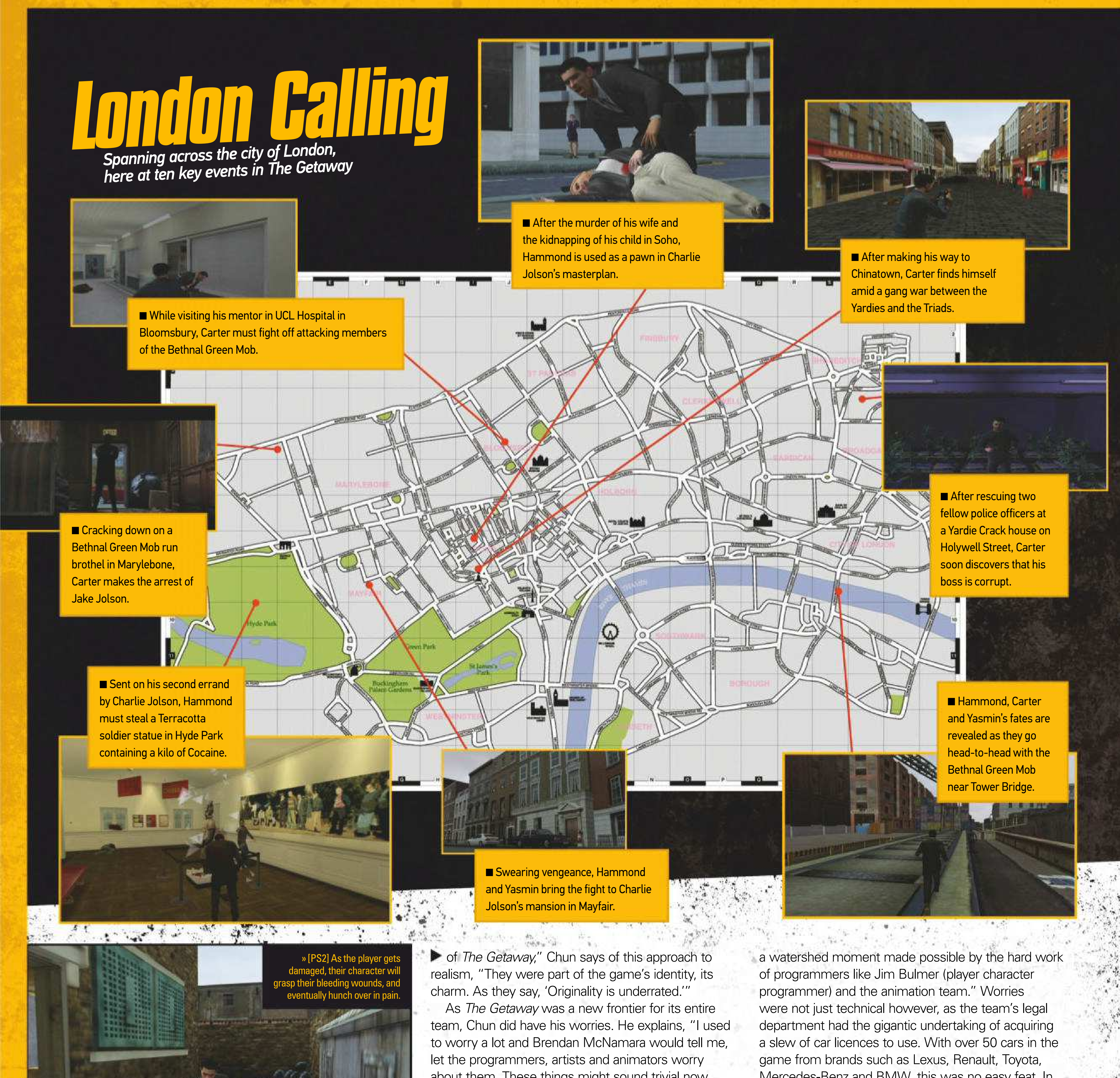
■ Though management loved Team Soho's prototype, the team needed to choose if they wanted to make a great, if safe, Playstation title or a PS2 title that tried something entirely new. Team Soho choose the latter.



» [PS2] Yasmin and Hammond make a fantastic duo, and though they don't share a lot of screen time, it's a memorable team-up.

London Calling

Spanning across the city of London, here at ten key events in The Getaway



■ After the murder of his wife and the kidnapping of his child in Soho, Hammond is used as a pawn in Charlie Jolson's masterplan.

■ After making his way to Chinatown, Carter finds himself amid a gang war between the Yardies and the Triads.

■ While visiting his mentor in UCL Hospital in Bloomsbury, Carter must fight off attacking members of the Bethnal Green Mob.

■ Cracking down on a Bethnal Green Mob run brothel in Marylebone, Carter makes the arrest of Jake Jolson.

■ After rescuing two fellow police officers at a Yardie Crack house on Holywell Street, Carter soon discovers that his boss is corrupt.

■ Sent on his second errand by Charlie Jolson, Hammond must steal a Terracotta soldier statue in Hyde Park containing a kilo of Cocaine.

■ Hammond, Carter and Yasmin's fates are revealed as they go head-to-head with the Bethnal Green Mob near Tower Bridge.

■ Swearing vengeance, Hammond and Yasmin bring the fight to Charlie Jolson's mansion in Mayfair.

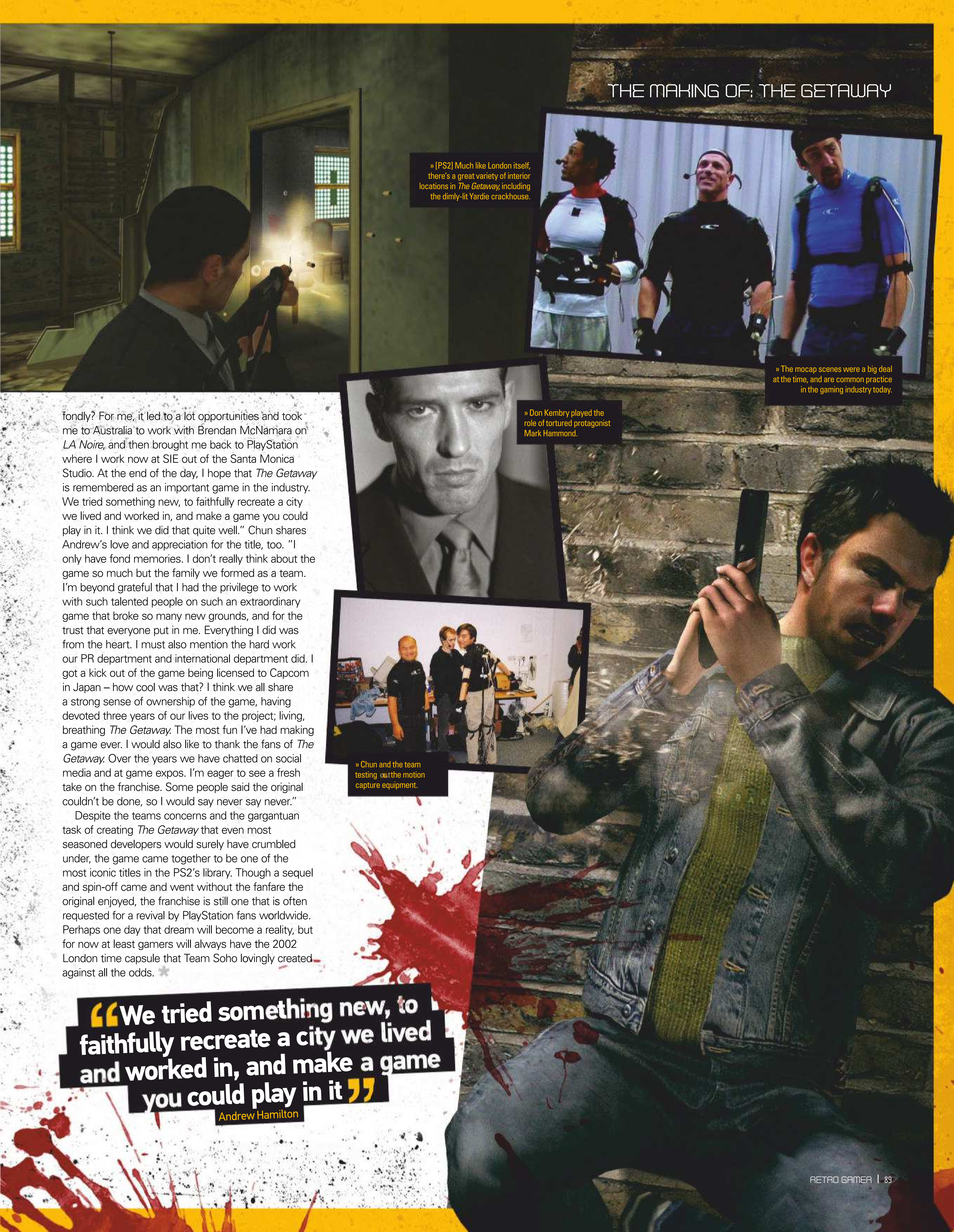
» [PS2] As the player gets damaged, their character will grasp their bleeding wounds, and eventually hunch over in pain.

» [PS2] As flashing indicators on a car essentially take the role of a minimap, once they're smashed it's time to find a new ride.

▶ of *The Getaway*," Chun says of this approach to realism, "They were part of the game's identity, its charm. As they say, 'Originality is underrated.'"

As *The Getaway* was a new frontier for its entire team, Chun did have his worries. He explains, "I used to worry a lot and Brendan McNamara would tell me, let the programmers, artists and animators worry about them. These things might sound trivial now, but back then it was an incredible accomplishment to mocap multiple people in the same scene at the same time. We did so to get the best performances from the actors. We eliminated loading screens with a dynamic loading system so you can roam freely in the game, creating a seamless experience. Lesser games back then normally would have stopped to load a new area, or an interior level. There was also the transition from a team that was experienced in making racing games to one where character-based action adventure had an equal if not bigger share of the game, I must confess that initially had a lot of people worried. I remember the day when I could press the 'exit car' button and was able to run around as Mark, that was a watershed moment made possible by the hard work of programmers like Jim Bulmer (player character programmer) and the animation team." Worries were not just technical however, as the team's legal department had the gigantic undertaking of acquiring a slew of car licences to use. With over 50 cars in the game from brands such as Lexus, Renault, Toyota, Mercedes-Benz and BMW, this was no easy feat. In fact, some cars that were featured in the game during development now only exist within early beta versions of the game, most likely lost to gaming history.

Looking back at the *The Getaway*, Andrew remarks, "It was the first triple-A game I worked on, and the first time I'd seen the artwork we'd created everywhere – what felt like every shop window around. It was also the 100 millionth disc though Sony's DADC, which the team all got a limited edition version of the game to commemorate that. We even had a 'premier' in Leicester Square at a cinema, with limos, press, and a red carpet. How can you not look back at that



» [PS2] Much like London itself, there's a great variety of interior locations in *The Getaway*, including the dimly-lit Yardie crackhouse.

» The mocap scenes were a big deal at the time, and are common practice in the gaming industry today.

» Don Kembry played the role of tortured protagonist Mark Hammond.

» Chun and the team testing out the motion capture equipment.

fondly? For me, it led to a lot opportunities and took me to Australia to work with Brendan McNamara on *LA Noire*, and then brought me back to PlayStation where I work now at SIE out of the Santa Monica Studio. At the end of the day, I hope that *The Getaway* is remembered as an important game in the industry. We tried something new, to faithfully recreate a city we lived and worked in, and make a game you could play in it. I think we did that quite well." Chun shares Andrew's love and appreciation for the title, too. "I only have fond memories. I don't really think about the game so much but the family we formed as a team. I'm beyond grateful that I had the privilege to work with such talented people on such an extraordinary game that broke so many new grounds, and for the trust that everyone put in me. Everything I did was from the heart. I must also mention the hard work our PR department and international department did. I got a kick out of the game being licensed to Capcom in Japan – how cool was that? I think we all share a strong sense of ownership of the game, having devoted three years of our lives to the project; living, breathing *The Getaway*. The most fun I've had making a game ever. I would also like to thank the fans of *The Getaway*. Over the years we have chatted on social media and at game expos. I'm eager to see a fresh take on the franchise. Some people said the original couldn't be done, so I would say never say never."

Despite the teams concerns and the gargantuan task of creating *The Getaway* that even most seasoned developers would surely have crumbled under, the game came together to be one of the most iconic titles in the PS2's library. Though a sequel and spin-off came and went without the fanfare the original enjoyed, the franchise is still one that is often requested for a revival by PlayStation fans worldwide. Perhaps one day that dream will become a reality, but for now at least gamers will always have the 2002 London time capsule that Team Soho lovingly created against all the odds. ★

"We tried something new, to faithfully recreate a city we lived and worked in, and make a game you could play in it"
Andrew Hamilton



> "The Commodore 64 was my first love. I've been obsessed since I was a teenager"
>
> Darren Melbourne

FIRST JOB
Cleaning sports cars at a showroom

CURRENT JOB
Licensing director at Antstream

FAVOURITE FILM
Star Wars

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Hatful Of Hollow – The Smiths

FAVOURITE BOOK:
The First Fifteen Lives Of Harry August – Claire North

FIRST COMPUTER/CONSOLE
Atari VCS

FAVOURITE COMPUTER/CONSOLE
C64

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
Releasing the C64 Mini

BESTSELLING PRODUCT:
The Lion King

BEST HOLIDAY
Rome

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
Amy, my wife. If not her, Stephen Fry.

187-0681051030320681171O3

SEX
M

NAME
Darren Melbourne

DATE OF BIRTH
26/8/68

PLACE OF BIRTH
Bromley, South East London

BIOGRAPHY
Darren has spent over three decades in the games industry, working on games for the C64, NES and Game Boy right up to this year's C64 Mini.

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Darren Melbourne

What cherished games would you take to the island?

After 30 years in the games business, Darren Melbourne is still as passionate about games as when he first typed 'LOAD Wizball'. Meet Mr C64 Mini

Words by Paul Drury

Darren Melbourne is sure our time as retro gamers is now. "Retro is in the zeitgeist," he enthuses. "Everyone wants to be known as a retro gamer but we worked out that between 1972 and 1995, around 100,000 games were released, of which you could play about 500 today. It's a ridiculous state of affairs."

Darren and the team at Antstream want to rectify that. Their retro gaming streaming service aspires to be the 'Netflix for games' and allow the non-techy masses to easily play the games they loved from their youth or missed first time round on any modern platform. He bubbles with enthusiasm about playing *Street Fighter II* on your television at home, pausing it and heading out, continuing your game on the bus via your smartphone, before unleashing that winning Hadoken on your laptop when you get to work, though we're not sure how much work you'd ever get done.

It's not the first time he's tried to bring old games to a modern audience. In 2005, he helped bring the C64 DTTV plug-and-play joystick to market and this year he's enjoyed great success and personal satisfaction with the C64 Mini. "The Commodore 64 was my first love," he beams. "I've been obsessed since I was a teenager. For me, no other machine comes close for capturing the magic of those early computing days."

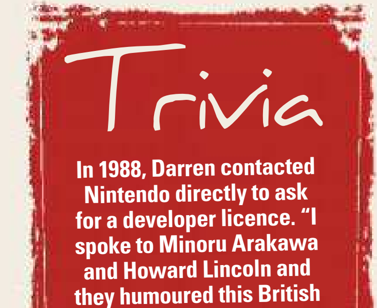
That childhood passion for all things beige led him and his schoolmates to frequent the many computer shows of the mid-Eighties, often congregating around the Llamasoft stand, and their love of Jeff Minter's work naturally led to a little light stalking. "49 Mount Pleasant, Tadley, Hants," says Darren, Jeff's address tripping easily off his tongue 30 years after they all turned up at his door, unannounced. "A bunch of us had got to know Jeff at shows back when we were 15 or 16, so he was kind enough to let us into his house. He had arcade games! His mum would make you tea while you were playing *Tempest* and *Star Wars*."

Teenage dreams are indeed hard to beat and Darren was determined to get into the industry he loved. The problem was, he couldn't really code nor was he much of an artist. What he had got was confidence and a sharp eye. Young Darren had read an article in *Computer Trade Weekly* on Bill Delaney, who had recently left Beyond Software of *Lords Of Midnight* fame to set up his own games company, Nexus. Bizarrely, Darren then spotted Bill washing his Jaguar XJS one Sunday morning on his way to the paper shop and was cocky enough to ask Bill, soapy sponge still in hand, to invest in a new venture. "And it worked! He set us up in an office in Beckenham, South East London, and he funded *Hades Nebula* and *Blazer*. I was just very precocious," he admits with a grin.

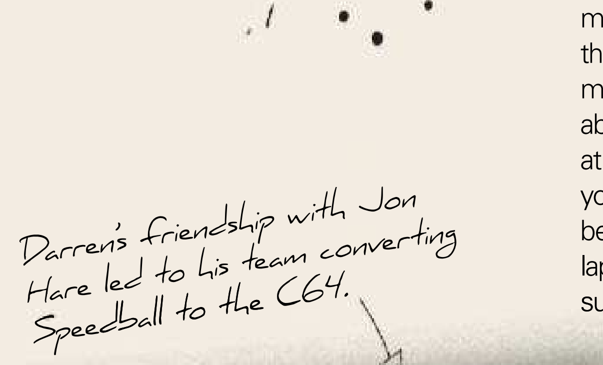
Their little company, Paranoid Software, consisting of Darren, Mark Greenshields, Ned Langman and a handful of employees, produced both games to tight, three-month deadlines during 1987. Both were decent if tough scrolling shooters, complimented by banging tunes from Ben Daglish and a sprite multiplexor routine created with some pointers from *The Last Ninja* coder John Twiddy, who gets a thank you on the *Hades Nebula* high score screen. Darren and his crew were also in touch with the *Zzap!64* trio of Gary Penn, Julian Rignall and Gary Liddon, often visiting them in Ludlow, and when the latter Gary moved in with Jon Hare, they got friendly with him just as he was coding *Wizball*. It all sounds like Darren was living the dream of being part of his beloved C64 scene.

"It was great for about four months until it all went wrong," sighs Darren. "We realised the bosses of Nexus had sold exclusive rights to release our games to about three different people. It became a bit of a bunfight and nobody got paid. It was the first of many painful but valuable lessons in the sharp business practices of the games industry."

The short and not terribly sweet experience meant the Paranoid gang went their separate ways and Darren became development manager and first employee of SCi in 1988. Founded by former Telecomsoft executive Jane Cavanagh, the company would go on to become an industry giant but for now, the fledgling operation was essentially the pair of them



In 1988, Darren contacted Nintendo directly to ask for a developer licence. "I spoke to Minoru Arakawa and Howard Lincoln and they humoured this British teenager for a good 20 minutes. I had no idea I was talking to the heads of Nintendo Of America."





Darren's friendship with Jon Hare led to his team converting Speedball to the C64.





Praise for Darren

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Darren's work…



Darran Jones
I've played a number of the Game Boy games that Darren has been involved with and I always find it fascinating how tech was squeezed onto the machine. **Retro Gamer** typically focuses on the developers, so it's interesting to take a peek at the other aspects of creating a game.



Paul Drury
It was fascinating to talk to someone involved with the business deals, back-room shenanigans and sheer hard work involved in getting games to market and reassuring to discover Darren was still very much in love with games. Plus as a fellow Commodore 64 fan, we bonded over our mutual affection for the beige beast.

in an office in Clapham. Darren was constantly on the phone to arcade companies in Japan and the USA, trying to secure licences to convert coin-op titles to the home micros of the day, and somehow, this 20-year old from South London managed to convince the likes of Sega and Taito to let them have the rights to such big names as *Shinobi*, *Ninja Warriors* and *Silkworm*. Then came the small issue of finding a development team that could handle the conversion, within budget and delivered on time.

"It's all about spotting the deal," explains Darren. "I'd get on the phone to developers like Software Creations and Probe and work out who could deliver something cost effectively. We concentrated on quality and I think we did a good job. I mean, Simon Pick's C64 version of *Nemesis* was fantastic and I loved *Rodland*, too. I'll admit the people handling the original conversion of *Shinobi* messed it up royally. I'll be kind and not mention any names but then we brought it in-house and it was brilliant!"

Darren clearly took a great personal interest in each product, being a dedicated gamer himself, and after leaving SCi at the end of the Eighties, he set up another small development company, handling the C64 *Speedball* conversion and a few budget titles for Atlantis, before joining old mate Mark Greenshield's company, Enigma Variations. His projects often involved converting 16-bit games to 8-bit platforms and we wondered how his team went about squeezing something like *Populous* on to the NES and Game Boy?

> "It's almost like we were embarrassed to ask for what we were worth"
> Darren Melbourne

"With a great deal of pain," he grimaces. "*Populous* was a line-for-line conversion from the 68000 code Peter Molyneux had sent us, so we could keep the integrity of the game logic. Then, just as the games were complete, Peter decided he wanted to add some new features for our console versions so we had to go back and rejig. Peter was interesting to work with. He's a creative genius; when he sees a Game Boy, he doesn't think, 'What are the restrictions of this 8-bit machine?' but instead he goes, 'What new features can we put into my game?' It was our headache to make it happen. We did it all in about six months, which shows how talented that team was."

Darren remains proud of his work at Enigma Variations, which included *Super Kick Off* for the SNES, NES and Game Boy and *Tip Off* and *The Addams Family: Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt*, both for the NES and Game Boy. He was even part of the team that produced a game for the ill-fated Konix console. Yet we wonder how he was settling into his position as producer, still a relatively new role in the games business at the start of the Nineties? "Back then a producer was the person that did everything," Darren explains, "from the finance to buying pizzas for late-night coding sessions, to playtesting and even some level design. Basically, it was everything the programmer and the artist didn't do. They would appreciate what I did… but when someone has worked all weekend, they don't want someone like the producer criticising their work. You can rapidly become the most hated person in the office, as well. It's a thin line to walk."

Darren's balancing act continued when he left Enigma Variations to set up Phoenix Interactive. As CEO he was responsible for the overall running of the company but as the boss, it meant he could have more of a say in game design. He talks with particular fondness of the 'Chaos Mapping System' he created for *Porky Pig's Haunted Holiday*, which would change the environment and weather system every time you played. "You'd boot up a level and it might be in bright sunshine, then play it another time and it would be snowing… and the environment changes, too. The game is set in a dream so you can be pretty crazy."

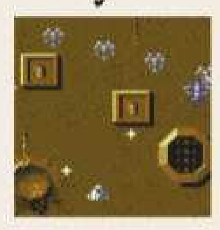
Released in 1995 for the SNES, *Haunted Holiday* was an interesting take on the platformer and along with *Tiny Troops* for the Amiga, proved his team could create its own original titles alongside big names such as *The Lion King*. "That was my first foray into working with Disney and was exceptionally painful,"

Darren (left) with his Paranoid Software partner Ned Langman in 1988. He's not changed a bit.

Timeline

1987 | 1989 | 1992 | 1995

HADES NEBULA
■ **YEAR:** 1987
■ **FORMAT:** C64
Darren began his career with this *Star Force*-inspired vertically scrolling shooter, which looks and sounds the part but is rather spoiled by its sadistic level of difficulty.



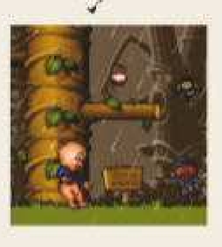
SHINOBI
■ **YEAR:** 1989
■ **FORMAT:** Amiga
While at SCi, Darren secured licences to put some big arcade titles on to home micros, including this fine 16-bit version of Sega's ninja favourite.



SUPER KICK OFF
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **FORMAT:** SNES
Dino Dini's top-down take on footy gets nicely updated for the Super Nintendo, with a wealth of customisable options to tinker with.



PORKY PIG'S HAUNTED HOLIDAY
■ **YEAR:** 1995
■ **FORMAT:** SNES
Darren gets a designer credit on this platformer, which had variable weather conditions to accompany the action.



Tiny Troops (Amiga) had you tiptoeing through the tulips before launching a surprise attack.



Some early development shots of Populous on the Game Boy.

The Konix Konnection

We were intrigued to discover that at the end of the Eighties, Darren and his team had contacted the makers of the ill-fated Konix Multisystem with a view to developing a launch title. "We showed them a demo of a game we were working on called *The Chaos Drop*," explains Darren. "They loved it and commissioned us to write a game which became *The Magician's Apprentice*. Technically the Konix was really nice but they were taking on Sega and Nintendo and they just didn't have the money to do that. The console never got released, of course, and I'm pretty sure ours was the only completed game for it." Look out for a 'Whatever Happened To?' story in a future issue.

Darren winces. "We were working with the biggest animation company in the world and they really didn't understand the challenge of getting Simba to animate on an 8-bit NES. They kept asking why it didn't look the same as the 16-bit version. Getting their approval was a nightmare… the day we shipped that game we all gave a massive sigh of relief!"

Darren is quick to praise the artistic skills of Nick 'Swifty' Dent and the coding talents of Andrew 'Roo' Bowen, who made the lion roar on the ageing NES, but is also refreshingly honest about his own shortcomings. Despite producing some well received and, particularly with *The Lion King*, commercially successful games, Phoenix was a short lived venture due to that old chestnut of 'financial pressures'. "When it came to asking for a budget, I mucked it up royally more than once," he admits. "I'd put my thumb in the air and think of a number which I thought would mean we could keep the studio doors open and that didn't always work. It's almost like we were embarrassed to ask for what we were worth. Like, we put *Super Kick Off* on the SNES for £35,000… they sold around 400,000 units, maybe more, and were making at least £15 a unit. They had a great deal and we were starving."

From the ashes of Phoenix rose G3 Interactive and as the new millennium dawned, Darren managed to secure deals to produce a number of Game Boy Color driving games, including *TOCA* and *Colin McRae Rally*. Was it a relief to have a consistent genre and platform for your team to focus on for a few years, we wonder? "You have a few goes at [a type of game] and you build up a skillset," he smiles. "Those that get it right first time are incredibly fortunate. Plus we had a very understanding producer at THQ: me."

Yes, Darren had a foot in both camps. With G3 having produced *Caspar* on the Game Boy Color and then landing the *TOCA* conversion, he was asked to become European third party development director for THQ. It was undoubtedly a step up and he ended up overseeing around 50 titles during his ▶

Melbourne on Melbourne

Darren picks his three favourite projects.



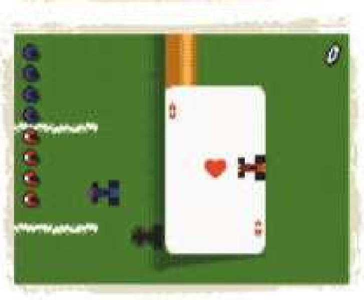
■ PUGSLEY'S SCAVENGER HUNT

Squeezing a SNES game into its 8-bit cousins was not easy, but the team managed it and this still looks great and plays well.



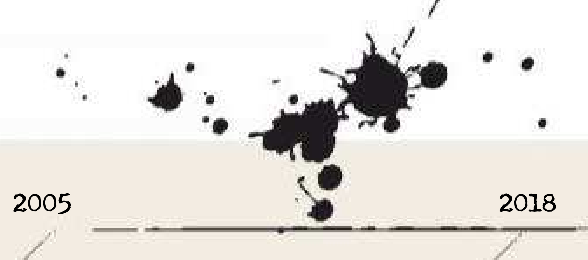
■ POPULOUS

We achieved the impossible! Not only did we create compelling versions, we actually worked with Peter Molyneux to add new spells and game modes.



■ MICRO MACHINES V3

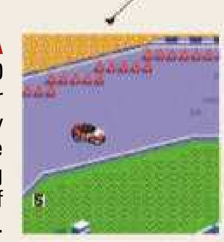
Creating pseudo 3D on a Game Boy Color led to some excellent reviews at the time. The gameplay was and still is superb.



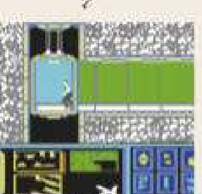
1995 — 2000 — 2005 — 2018



THE LION KING
■ **YEAR:** 1995
■ **FORMAT:** Game Boy
Squeezing the tale of Simba, Timon, Pumbaa et al on to the humble NES was no mean feat and this 8-bit version retains most of the original's features.



TOCA
■ **YEAR:** 2000
■ **FORMAT:** Game Boy Color
This handheld version sensibly adopts an isometric view of the racing action and is worth playing if only for the simple pleasure of scattering cones at every corner.



IMPOSSIBLE MISSION
■ **YEAR:** 2005
■ **FORMAT:** Mobile
Darren's enduring love for the C64 led to him helping to put a number of Epyx titles on to mobile, including a version of this seminal puzzle platformer.



C64 MINI
■ **YEAR:** 2018
If you needed more proof of his beige credentials, Darren was a key member of the team that brought this plug-and-play to market. We can't wait for the handheld model.



Readers' Questions

Northway: So streaming a pinball game is just fine, right?
Yes it is! *Pinball Fantasies* works brilliantly on Antstream.

Merman: What were the biggest challenges of working with the Game Boy hardware?
The screen update. It was so poor compared to anything else we were working on at the time. You had to put a lot of consideration into creating games for it.

Matt_B: Regarding the C64 Mini, when will the firmware update arrive and what is the likely schedule for the full-size and handheld models?
We've done several firmware updates but the big one everyone is waiting for, which allows you to play multiple games off a memory stick, is coming soon! Hopefully by the time your readers are reading this. We're currently testing the full-size and handheld versions of the C64 and we do update the community every Friday, telling them about progress.

Merman: What would be your dream license to create a game around?
I'd still like to create something in the *Star Wars* universe. I've come very close on occasions to getting something going and I still hope it might happen one day.

FGasking: Have you worked on any unreleased games?
Lots! I don't think *Populous* on the NES was ever released. It was absolutely complete, but never came out and it was brilliant – it was so good, we tried to use it as an argument for letting us do a C64 version of *Populous* but the C64 market was very limited by then. It had convinced us we could do it, though. In the mid-Nineties we were doing a Nigel Mansell racing game for the C64 and again, it wasn't considered financially viable, which was a shame as it was coming on really well.

Merman: Are you good at playing games yourself?
Depends on the game and depends who you ask! Steve Cottam, the CEO of Anstream, and I have an ongoing competition on *Street Fighter II* every time we're in Japan and so far I reign victorious. I play as Ken. He's like Ryu but cool.

Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt was an impressive port of the SNES game.

> "I'd been trying to blag my way into industry parties since I was 17... and suddenly I was on the guest list"
> Darren Melbourne

tenure, from the impressive *Micro Machines V3* on the GBC to big PC games like *X: Beyond the Frontier* and *Yager*. Surely it was hard to be as personally involved with individual titles when your remit is so wide-ranging, we ask? "Yes there were a lot more meetings, a lot of commuting and a lot of business talk," Darren acknowledges. "I was far happier working directly with the teams and a lot of them were still small teams. I mean, the *Yager* boys were just five guys based in what used to be East Berlin. Visiting them was like a scene from *The Ipcress Files*! You know, I'd spent my life since I was 17 trying to blag my way into industry parties. When I joined THQ, suddenly I found I was on the guest list of the Sony party, the Sega party… it was an incredible time."

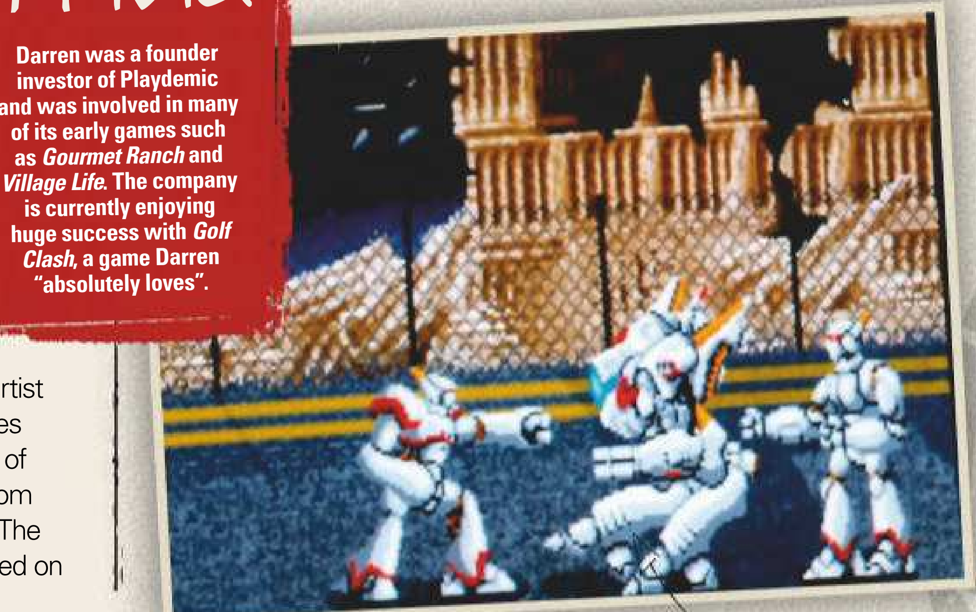
During his time with THQ, Darren could see that mobile gaming was going to be a huge part of videogames. He was one of the two founders of THQ Wireless, which enjoyed huge success in the early Noughties by putting *BatteMail*, a kind of 'rock-paper-scissors' play by email fighting game, on to a staggering 36 million Siemens handsets, with players exchanging their moves via SMS. His interest in mobile gaming led to the founding of the Rockpool Games group of companies, in partnership with the *BattleMail* creators Paul Gouge and artist Alex Rigby, and together they put such recognisable names as *Sega Rally* and Top Trumps on to mobile phones. And, of course, Darren was eager to revisit some beloved titles from his C64 days, too. "I can't get away from it," he laughs. "The Epyx rights had been forgotten about for years but I hopped on a plane to the States, managed to track down the rights holder and brought *Impossible Mission*, *California Games*, *Chips Challenge* and others to early mobiles. They were hugely popular… though back then, every manufacturer had different technical specs for their phones. If you then include different language versions, we were often building almost a thousand versions of each game!"

Darren might have spent over three decades in the industry, in such managerial roles as producer, licensing director and CEO, and has been part of over a dozen companies, from start-ups to international conglomerates, yet his love of old games has never diminished. He talks with real passion about his hopes for Antstream and his plans for a C64 Mini handheld plus a full-sized model. He even alludes to another much loved Commodore machine getting the 'mini' treatment soon. Will retro gaming always be a part of his future? "I think it has to be. In Japan, there really isn't the concept of retro – there are only good games. It doesn't matter when a game was made or for what platform, if it was a good game then, it's a good game now. Yes, each new generation has its own idea of what retro is and it reminds them of a simpler time, when they first got into gaming. That will never change for me." *

Thanks for Darren for use of exclusive images, and Frank for the introduction.

Trivia

Darren was a founder investor of Playdemic and was involved in many of its early games such as *Gourmet Ranch* and *Village Life*. The company is currently enjoying huge success with *Golf Clash*, a game Darren "absolutely loves".



Mechanoids (SNES) was one of Darren's 'Games That Weren't'.



Darren's Desert Island Disks

The games that Darren simply couldn't live without

01 Golf Clash (MOBILE)
My favourite mobile game of all time. You can play single holes and full tournaments against friends and random opponents from around the world, with new courses and tournaments launched regularly. The only real downside of *Golf Clash* is that when you miss an apparently easy shot, it can reduce the lifespan of your phone dramatically.

02 Words With Friends (MOBILE)
A simplistic game with infinite playability. It's basically online multiplayer *Scrabble* but if any Hasbro IP attorneys are reading this then it's an original word game with no resemblance to your IP whatsoever… honest!

03 Soulcalibur (DREAMCAST)
It's everything a one-on-one combat game should be, with a wide variety of characters and weapons, great backdrops, tight moves and combinations and a perfectly balanced difficulty curve. With the release of *Soulcalibur*, Namco finally toppled their own champion, the mighty *Tekken*, as the best fighting game for a home console.

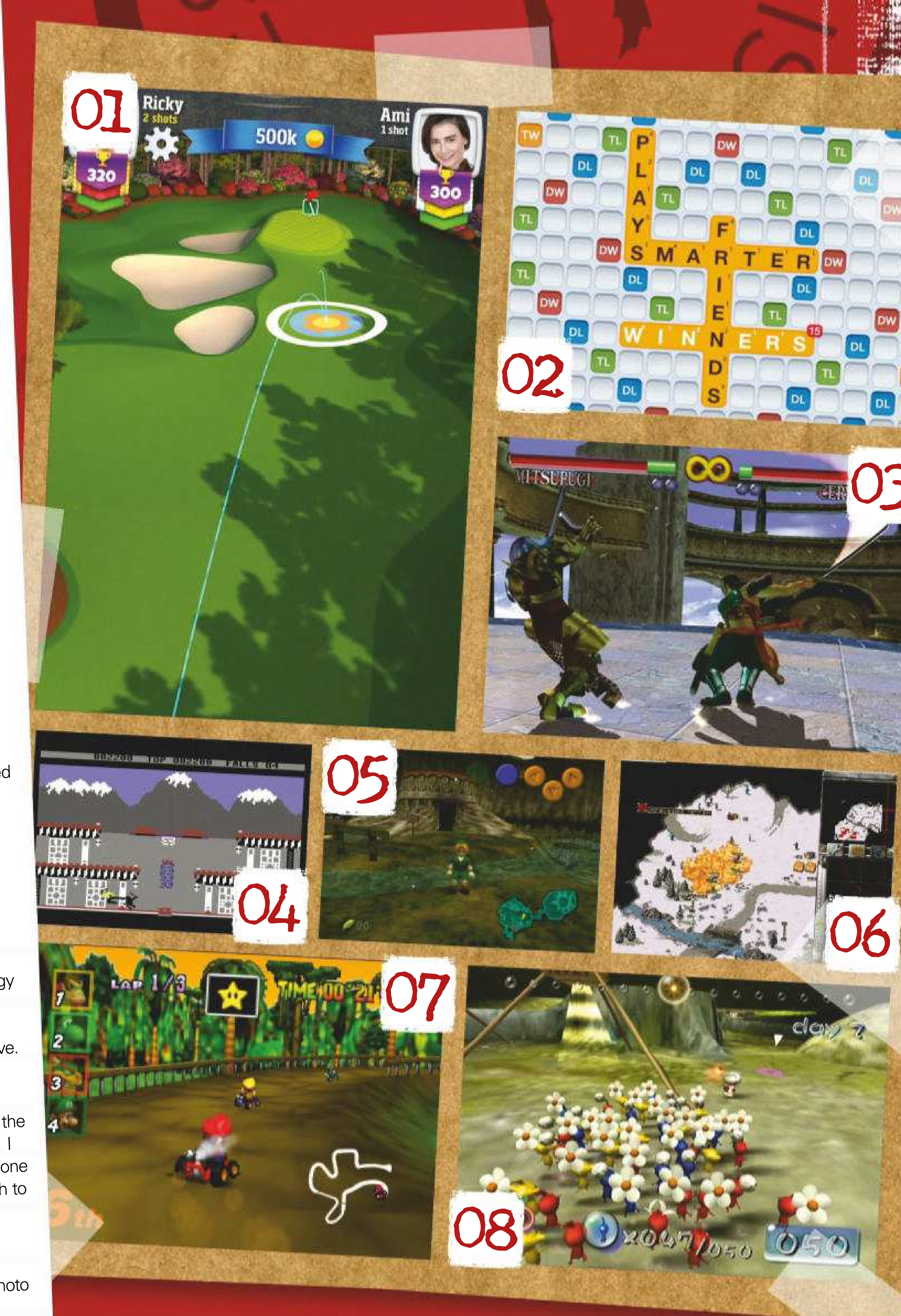
04 Bruce Lee (C64)
I've been playing this game for the past 30 years and I still love playing it today. It's a relatively simple game that sees Bruce exploring 20 levels, collecting lanterns and fighting against the green Sumo, Yamo, and a black Ninja but as the game progresses, the traps get far more difficult to traverse safely.

05 The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (N64)
Booting this up on Christmas morning 1998, I was captivated by the new 3D world of *Zelda*. The game is incredible, with puzzles to solve, a huge world to explore, hundreds of characters to interact with and, of course, an Ocarina to play. Shigeru Miyamoto really is the master of his craft and his genius is evident in everything he touches.

06 Command & Conquer (PC)
My friend Matt Spall was the producer of *C&C* in the UK and he had told me how special it was. I had played strategy games before but this was the first time I'd played an 'arcade' strategy game. It's a masterpiece, with incredible cinematics, compelling gameplay and a great difficulty curve.

07 Super Mario 64 (N64)
I was doubtful that a 3D platform game could ever match the playability of a 2D game but Miyamoto proved me wrong! I was utterly obsessed by this game and couldn't leave it alone until I had completed it. The series has gone from strength to strength but for me, this is still the best.

08 Pikmin (GAMECUBE)
Charming, magical, whimsical, genius. Once again Miyamoto did the impossible and created a real-time strategy game without the need for a mouse. Even though it gets really tough, it's never anything but a pure pleasure to play.




09:53
EMPTY
EMPTY



Jumping Flash!

ON A PLATFORM IN THE SKY THERE LIVED A ROBBIT

» RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION » 1995 » EXACT/ULTRA

Of all the games on the original version of *Demo 1, Jumping Flash!* was the one I found most fascinating. The music was jaunty, there was a frog in a top hat, and I'd never seen a platform game like it. A little while later I got to try the game when I was given a bunch of old *Official PlayStation Magazine* demos, and I decided that I had to have it. However, I struggled to track it down – I got the PlayStation a few years into the machine's life, and used copies weren't easy to find by that point.

Thankfully, when I did get it I wasn't disappointed. It sounds like it shouldn't work – platforming sections are often notoriously poorly implemented in first-person games. However, the way the view automatically shifted to show you what was under Robbit's feet during high jumps was excellent. *Jumping Flash!* isn't a hard game and PlayStation graphics had already moved on considerably, but the music is excellent and the levels are fun to explore – I particularly loved the fact that you could reach dizzying heights with the triple jump. Plus, it's just nice to play a game from a time when designers were still trying to crack 3D platform games, before *Super Mario 64* set the genre's conventions.

So as you can imagine, I'm really pleased to see that *Jumping Flash!* has been announced for the PlayStation Classic. Hopefully, some of you will play it for the first time and come to love it like I do.



>> This month we take a look at the remaster of Disgaea, take to the squared circle with the latest Fire Pro Wrestling release and reveal if Mega Man 11 has been worth the wait



PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Mega Man 11
The latest game to star the blue bomber is a real treat with interesting game mechanics and a satisfying difficulty level.



NICK
Soulcalibur VI
We got this through just before deadline, but I'm loving it – the fighting is great while the story has good fan service.



» [PS4] Most units start off pretty much useless – there's quite the grind to get them up to spec.

Disgaea 1 Complete

HAPPY 15TH BIRTHDAY, DOOD!

INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:**
PS4

» **ALSO ON:**
SWITCH

» **RELEASED:**
OUT NOW

» **PRICE:**
£49.99

» **DEVELOPER:**
NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE

» **PUBLISHER:**
NIS AMERICA

» **PLAYERS:**
1

***Disgaea* back in 2003 was a breath of fresh air in a genre that, while largely underserved, was still managing to feel a mite stale.** It was bright and funny – never taking itself seriously – backed by some of the absolute deepest and sprawling mechanics of any game, in any genre, and generally speaking an instant classic on PS2. It's genuinely surprising how much of that feeling remains now, 15 years later, with this anniversary edition releasing on PS4 and Switch.

It shows its age in some ways – more on that in a bit – but the original *Disgaea* is still just as vital as it ever was, just as much fun, and just as bewilderingly deep. It actually shows up the genre – specifically what's been coming out of Japan for the past 15 years – offering a depth of experience that puts even titles released last year to shame. You might be wondering why the score at the end of this review is so low given that glowing praise. It'll all make sense, we promise.

So just what is this 15-year-old silliness? Well, *Disgaea* sees you taking the role of Laharl: a young demon on a quest to reclaim the throne of the underworld. Pretty straightforward it might sound, but the story – very much a strong point of the game – takes its fair share of turns along the way. What (still) sets *Disgaea* apart from its contemporaries – old and new – is its sense of humour. Now obviously it won't click with everyone out there, but this is a game that knows how daft it's being and relishes the chance to poke fun at itself, you, the tropes of the genre and a million other things. Far from undermining the experience, it's refreshing and serves to push you on to *want* to see and play more of it. As well as say, "Prinny, dood!" repeatedly. For about 15 years.

Combat – the main attraction – is on the surface your standard grid-based, turn-based tactical fare. Throw in (literally) Geo Stones, combo attacks, and a need to grind like your life depends on it and you soon realise this isn't as straightforward as it first appears. *Disgaea* is absolutely riddled

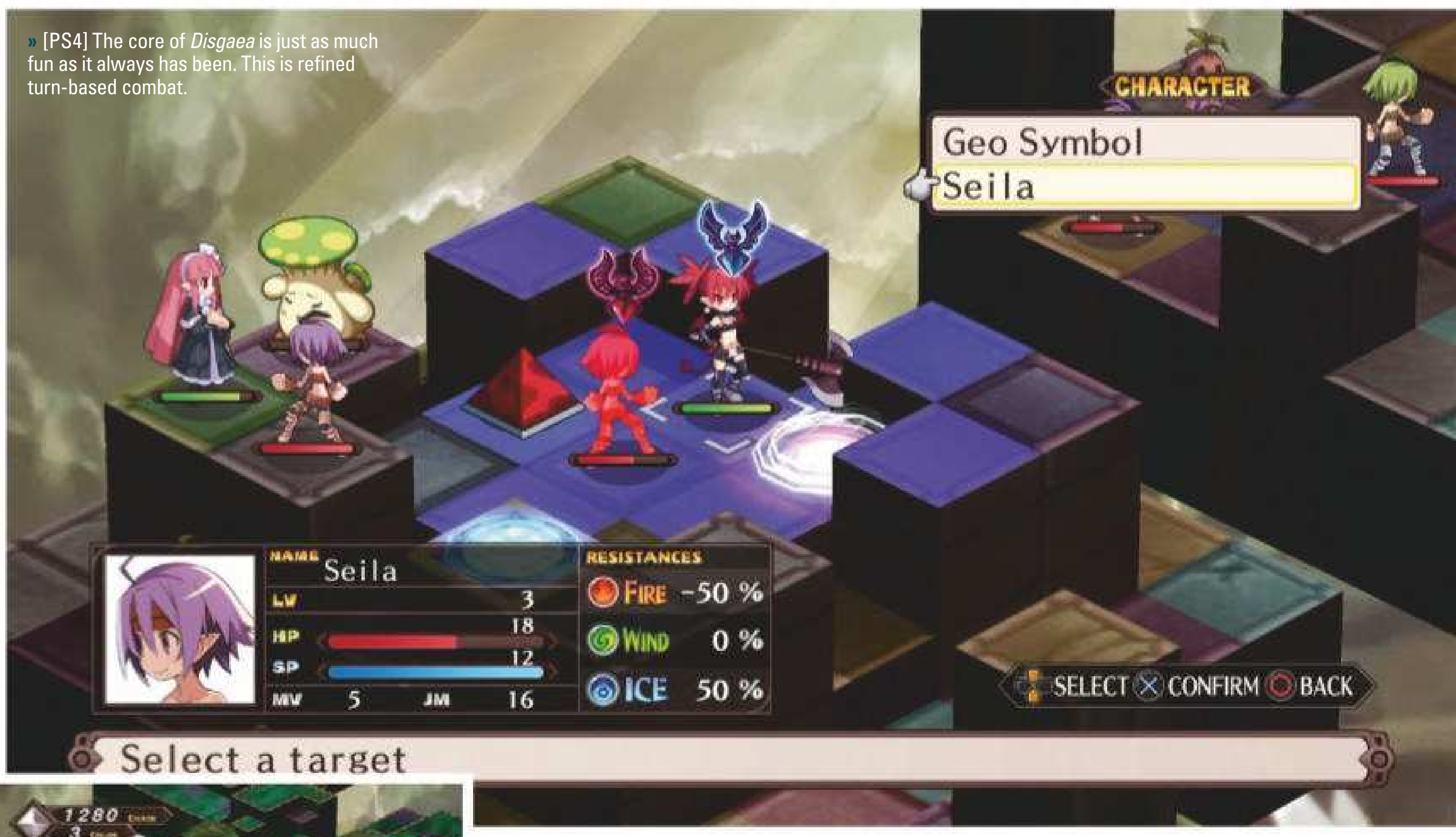


» [PS4] The lighthearted nature of *Disgaea* is still refreshing, even 15 years later.



BRIEF HISTORY

» *Disgaea* is easily one of the most successful – and prolific – turn-based strategy games ever. Originally arriving on PS2 in 2003, the first game was upgraded and rereleased on PSP in 2007, Nintendo DS in 2008, and eventually PC in 2016. This version marks its fifth version, meaning it's averaged a release every three years of its existence.



» [PS4] The core of *Disgaea* is just as much fun as it always has been. This is refined turn-based combat.

» [PS4] Geo symbols, initially a bit confusing, soon become your best friend when it comes to combos.

with depth, and it doesn't begin and end with the main campaign – in fact, it's that a-to-b storyline that's probably the most traditional and 'normal' part of the whole game.

Outside of the campaign there are elements like Item World – a, basically, infinite selection of procedurally generated levels that offer the chance to level up items and characters, as well as bag loot and cash. They also offer the chance to be brutalised by an ever-more-difficult array of enemies to take on, and quickly switches from a relaxing jaunt into an actual heart in mouth exercise in pure, furious stress.

And of course we can't forget the Dark Assembly, a selection of demon, ghost and other such monstrous types sitting on an underworld council, voting on motions put forward by the player. Want better weapons in the shop? Put it to the vote. They don't like you and vote you down? Win your votes by force. Creating a new character? Fine. Creating one with higher starting stats? You'll need approval on that. The meddling of the council could be frustrating, but instead operates as a sensible selection of roadblocks – and something you can circumvent using the ever-popular methods of murdering or bribing the demonic politicians.

If *Disgaea 1 Complete* were a brand-new game to come out now, in Space Year 2018, even with its low-res textures and poor audio samples it would be celebrated as an incredible game. There's near-unlimited depth to the thing, it has a ludicrous number of systems working in tandem to confuse and ultimately delight, and it's just got a *joy* about the whole thing that's (still) so refreshing in a largely po-faced genre. It is, in short, a superb game.

But *Disgaea 1 Complete* isn't a brand-new game – it's a 15th anniversary celebration of something released two console generations ago. We've been through the delight of how amazing the game proper is, meaning we need a bit more to go on if it is to be a true celebration of the game's greatness. What we've got here is a no-frills port with the bare minimum of work done to polish it up to a serviceable 2018 level.

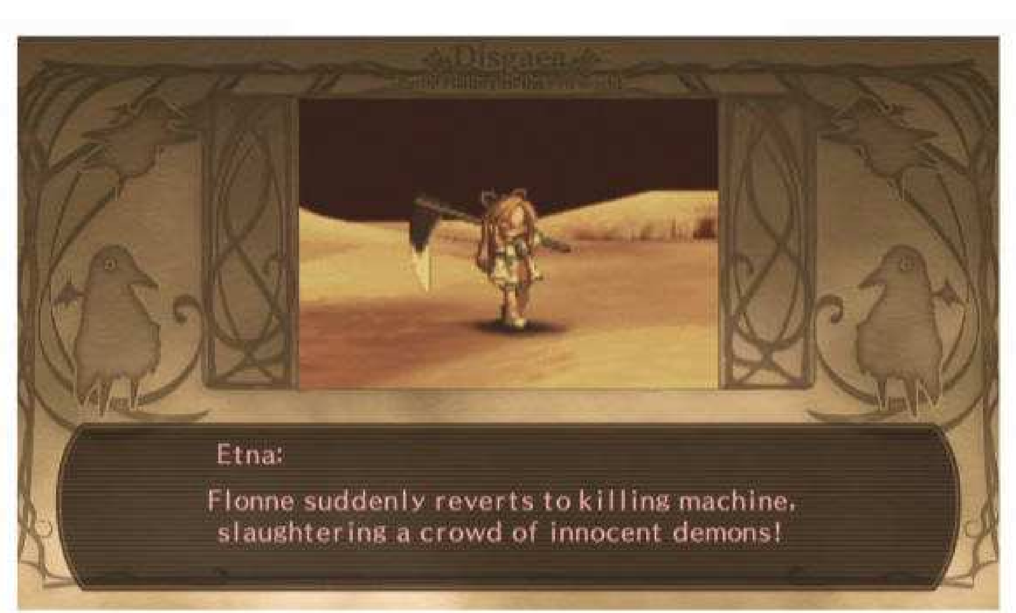
The sprites look beautiful on modern displays, and detail has improved across the board – but there are plenty of muddy textures and low-quality images throughout. It's painfully obvious the audio samples are taken from a 2003 game, with no re-recording – or remastering – done to bring things up to modern spec. And the game itself offers nothing beyond the campaign with the lone expansion added in the PSP and DS versions – no extra missions, characters… nothing at all.

Disgaea is a fantastic game – one of the absolute best turn-based strategy games ever made, no doubt about it. But *Disgaea 1 Complete*, meant to be a celebration, is sorely lacking. Oddly enough, this isn't really one for the fans; it's much more suited to those who have never played it before. And, frankly, they'll have a wonderful time of it. ✱

In a nutshell

***Disgaea* remains a fantastic strategy RPG full of depth, humour and style, however this remaster feels like a half-hearted nod rather than a 15-year celebration of the original.**
Ian Dransfield

>> Score **72%**



» [PS4] Elements like the 'next chapter' images being distinctly low-res harm *Disgaea*'s modern 4K credentials.

✱ THE TURN-BASED GREATS



FINAL FANTASY TACTICS

» One of the more successful spin-offs from the core *Final Fantasy* series, *Tactics* created a whole new world along with its new style of play for the franchise. In doing so, it also created a whole new legion of fans for its supremely balanced, nuanced tactical play.

TACTICS OGRE: LET US CLING TOGETHER

» The SNES original was great, the PlayStation and Saturn conversions were superb, and the PSP port took things on the road in spectacular style. Years before we had the likes of *Final Fantasy Tactics*, Quest brought us *Tactics Ogre*. And life was good.



VALKYRIA CHRONICLES

» Eschewing the traditional isometric perspective for an over-the-shoulder view and removing grid-based restrictions, *Valkyria Chronicles* was taking a risk with the turn-based purists. Fortunately it was a superb little package, well worth a play today.

VANDAL HEARTS

» Back when Konami still bothered making games, it pushed out this overlooked gem on PlayStation and Saturn. *Vandal Hearts* was an intense, gory, tactical delight – and thanks to its lack of rerelease over the years, has settled nicely into the role of rose-tinted legend.



UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN

» It wasn't just Japan that knocked it out of the park with turn-based strategy titles – this British-made classic contained all the tactics, depth, and abject terror you could ever hope for in a game about a nigh-on unstoppable alien invasion.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Mega Man 11

» System: Switch (tested) Xbox One, PC, PS4 **» Buy it from:** Online **» Buy it for:** £24.99

There's been an eight-year gap between the releases of *Mega Man 10* and *Mega Man 11*. Capcom hasn't been lazy during this time, though, and it's used it to make one of the best games in the series.

For the most part, *Mega Man 11* is business as usual. There are still eight bosses to beat, eight weapons to collect and utilise, as well as the usual attacks to master – like Mega Man's charge shot and his ability to perform a useful powerslide. Oh, and Capcom's hero still hasn't learned to duck under bullets!

The biggest mechanical change to Mega Man is the introduction of the new Double Gear system, which massively alters how you tackle each of *Mega Man 11*'s levels. By far the most useful of these new skills is the Speed Gear, which slows time down, making it easier for Mega Man to either avoid certain hazards or shoot enemies in a specific location. While the Speed Gear essentially manipulates Mega Man's surroundings, the Power Gear does what you think it would – delivers powerfully charged shots that can make short work of opponents. Additionally, when Mega Man's health reaches a critical point he can activate both gears at once to deliver a monstrously powerful shot (although he's severely weakened afterwards).

While the gear mechanics make Capcom's new game sound incredibly easy, that's not the case at all. They quickly expend energy whenever they're used, so you can't easily romp your way through stages on maximum charge and plenty of thought needs to be used to work out where you'll gain the most benefit from them. Purists will argue that they make the game too easy, but we still found *Mega Man 11* to be more than challenging (although the bosses do feel a little easier than past games).

While it doesn't quite match the brilliance of reinventions like *Sonic Mania*, *Mega Man 11* remains a fantastic return to form and a fitting way to celebrate the franchise's recent 30th anniversary.


Score **84%**





» [Switch] Sprite artwork is ditched in favour of this stylish cartoonlike aesthetic.



Fire Pro Wrestling World

» System: PS4 (Tested), PC
» Buy it from: Online, retail **» Buy it for:** £44.99

***The Fire Pro Wrestling* series has long been defined by a few core traits – tight game design built around a timing-based grapple system, incredible creation and customisation options, and a 2D visual style.** *Fire Pro Wrestling World* delivers all of that for a modern audience, so it's the best wrestling game out if you prefer substance to style.

The game features a wealth of match types, and your creations can be shared in a busy online marketplace. The addition of the New Japan Pro Wrestling licence gives access to popular stars including Kazuchika Okada and Kenny Omega. These wrestlers feature in a substantial single-player story mode which sees you work your way up from the dojos as a created character.


Score **90%**



Blade Strangers

» System: Switch (tested), PS4, PC
» Buy it from: Online, retail **» Buy it for:** £35.99

The latest fighting game from Studio Saizensen features heroes from *Cave Story*, *Code Princess*, *Umihara Kawase* and *The Binding Of Isaac*. On top of that, it also has one of the silliest stories we've witnessed in a fighting game for some time and one we quite enjoyed. Blessed with exquisite looking animation and a distinctive aesthetic, *Blade Strangers* is a solid brawler that suffers in the same way as *SNK Heroines* did in that it focuses on making the game more accessible which results in a severe lack of depth. Special moves require nothing more than an input direction and a button press, while the balancing of characters is a little off. It's entertaining enough, but there are far better options out there.


Score **63%**



Sonic The Hedgehog

» System: Switch
» Buy it from: Online **» Buy it for:** £5.99

Yes, it's *Sonic*'s original Mega Drive outing again, which likely feels overfamiliar to some of you. However, M2 has done a typically fantastic job with the emulation in this version, and has included *Sonic 2*'s spin dash and the new drop dash from *Sonic Mania*, as well as a new 'Ring Keep' mode for novices. You can select regional variants and even the Mega Play arcade version, a challenging variant which has stricter time limits and no extra lives.

The easy and normal modes found in *Sonic Jam* are nowhere to be seen, and neither is the spike damage toggle from *Sonic Mega Collection* nor the speed cap options of the mobile version. So while the new features are great, it's not a definitive version.


Score **82%**



» [PC] Trying to keep things nice and tidy with Ludum Dare entry, *Parking Spaces*.

» [PC] *The Tale of The Bagger* has an unexpected item in the bagging area.

» [PC] Here's *Bride*, a Game & Watch-style minigame; a bridesmaid is stepping over her rivals. Literally.

DARING ADVENTURES

August saw the latest iteration of the well-established Ludum Dare competition, where programmers all over the world are challenged to produce games in a very short period of time. The theme for this instalment was 'running out of space' and, as always, the developers were left to interpret that pretty much as they saw fit, producing over 3,000 games in the process. Since there's so many entries, we can barely skim the surface here, but a few did grab our attention. *Letterbox* looks like a 16-bit platformer, except the black borders around the playfield move inwards over time and can be used to wall jump to otherwise inaccessible places. Similarly, the spaceship in *Super Converger* must constantly blast enemies to keep the walls from closing in.

Of course, there are quirky entries like *Tale Of The Bagger: A Love Story* where the player bags up items on a supermarket till and, hopefully, falls in love. We also enjoyed the parking simulator *Parking Spaces* where vehicles must be safely stowed away until the timer on them expires and they're driven away. Finally, there's *Ludum Dare Simulator 2019* which tries to distil the experience of creating a Ludum Dare entry into a series of *WarioWare*-like minigames. These and the other entries in the competition can be picked up behind the link at Kikstart.me.uk/ludum-dare-42.

Another competition that's actually underway at the time of writing is being held at the English Amiga Board, so it probably won't be much of a surprise that all of the entries are for the Commodore Amiga. There are currently 13 announced entries, including a version of the classic coin-op *Rygar*, the *Audiosurf*-inspired *ModSurfer* and *Pumpkin Bros*, a platformer which the developer says will bare a resemblance to *Snow Bros*. There isn't much to actually see at the moment behind Kikstart.me.uk/eab-compo-2018 but that's where the developers are essentially blogging as they work, so be sure to check it out once the competition heats up.

Finally, there are a selection of Game And Watch-style titles that your can play in your computer or mobile device's web browser. A notable one of these is *Bride,* which sees the lady in question gathering flowers, avoiding love rivals and ultimately trying to capture the heart of her beloved. Punch in Kikstart.me.uk/bride-gw-web into your web browser to head over to the web-based versions of these games while the Atari Age thread behind Kikstart.eu/gandw-thread has further information.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

·HOMEBREW HEROES·

Jon Williams surprised Atari Age forumites, posting to a discussion about the portability of his game Baby Berks before converting it for everyone to enjoy. We got in touch for a chat about his return to 8-bit coding



Where did the idea for converting *Baby Berks* to the Atari 8-bit come from?
I had always intended doing some more 6502 programming after retiring a few years ago. I recently managed to get all of my old source code from the Eighties converted to assembler on a PC IDE and this spurred me on. It was by chance that I noticed a thread on the AtariAge forums suggesting that *Baby Berks* could be a candidate for porting to the Atari 8-bit – this was one of my C16 programs so it was the perfect way to refresh my memory on the hardware.

How long did it take to convert and what was involved?
It probably took two to three weeks in all but that was by no means full time. I use WUDSN so just copied the C16 source files into a new project and was up and running very quickly. I already had my Atari Timeslip code in WUDSN and it didn't take long to copy across Atari specific code in place of the C16 routines. The C16 doesn't have any hardware sprites so the main game code ran with surprisingly few changes. One challenge was in reducing the game character set from 256 to 128 characters. Fortunately, some of the characters were for the score, fuel indicator and game borders so with some rearranging I ended up with two sets switched a few times with Display List Interrupts. Another task was to rework characters and code to get some more colour into the game – though it's still not as colourful as the original.


» [Atari 8-bit] Herding the Big Berks to avoid getting caught in a corner.

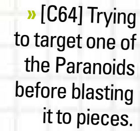
What kind of feedback have you had so far from Atari 8-bit owners?
I'm not too sure how many people downloaded the game but I did get some favourable feedback on the forums.

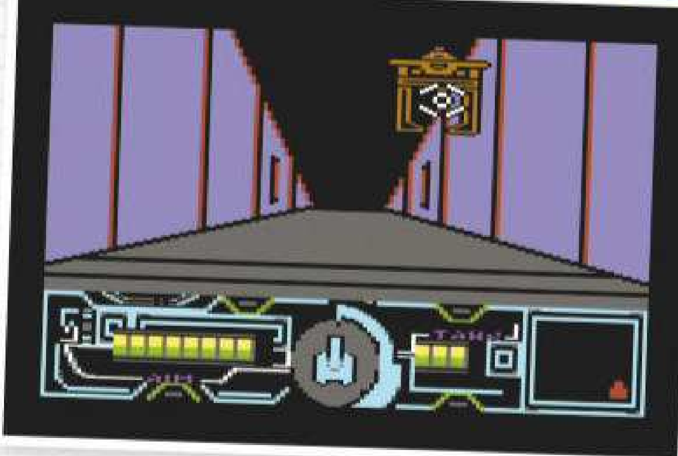
Looking at the tools available now, how do they compare with the ones you used in the Eighties?
I'm really impressed with the tools that are available to programmers of all 8-bit machines. After some research I decided to use WUDSN on the Eclipse IDE. I chose this setup because it allowed me to work on my Atari, C64 and C16 projects with a single assembler – MADS. I couple my Atari development with the Altirra emulator, the source level debugging is an amazing advance over my setup from the Eighties. It's a million miles from using Synassembler on my trusty Atari 800 with the assembled code being sent via the joystick ports to a target machine. I had to use Synassembler again to convert the original game source into modern format and the memories – and limitations – came flooding back.

And finally, have you got any future projects on the go that our readers might be interested in?
I'm just about to finish another C16 conversion to the Atari 8-bit, this is the second in the *Berks* trilogy, *Major Blink*. It's very much an old-school game but a perfect way to revisit my old code. I intend to write something original after that and have a few ideas bubbling.



» [Atari 8-bit] Blasting away within a surprisingly happy-looking level.


» [C64] Trying to target one of the Paranoids before blasting it to pieces.



SOMEONE WATCHING YOU

The latest release from Commodore 64 developers Sputnik World is *Paranoids*, an into-the-screen shoot-'em-up based on the fictional game '*Space Paranoids'* which appears as a coin-op in *Tron*. Destroying an enemy involves aiming where it's going rather than targeting directly and the action is set within a maze which, when not locked in battle, the player can guide their vehicle around freely.

If you fancy emulating Finn – after getting some practice in, of course – why not search through the maze it at Kikstart.me.uk/paranoids-c64.

> "One challenge was in reducing the character set from 256 to 128"



» [ZX Spectrum] The hunted temporarily becomes the hunter on finding a gun.

ONCE A NIGHT

***Night Stalker ZX* is a Spectrum conversion of the Intellivision maze-based shooter which has been developed by Aleisha Cuff.** The player's avatar is a stranded space marine who is being menaced both by the local fauna and relentless robots. The player is initially unarmed, but they can collect the handguns which occasionally materialise.

The original is one of those games that's both simple and enjoyable and, from what we've seen so far, this conversion manages the same feat. Kikstart.me.uk/night-stalker-spec goes to a YouTube video and there's a download in the description.

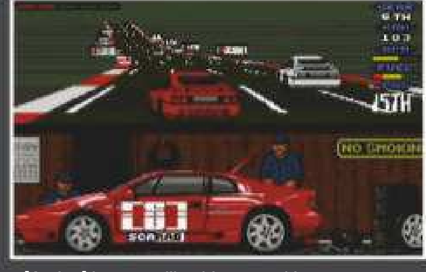
Gaming REVIEWS

·DO YOU· REMEMBER?

The first *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* was popular, but in 2006 an Amiga developer decided that the original was too big and he recreated pretty much the entire game in 96K. It does require more memory to run now, but there's no loading at all once the precalculations have been completed, so the only pauses are to take a breather between stages or for in-race pitstops and this game can also be booted from hard disk. And while *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge 96K* is already an impressive technical feat, it still manages to retain the high speed thrills of the game it's based upon as well so one or two human players get to tear around over 30 tracks against a cluster of computer-controlled opponents in a range of environments with curves, view-obscuring hills and hazards including road works and rocks. Kikstart.me.uk/lotus-96k-amiga will drive you at high speeds to the land of 96K.



» [Amiga] Taking corners at a ridiculous 199kph in the wintery wonderland.



» [Amiga] In a race like this, overtaking happens pretty much everywhere.





DAWN OF KERNEL

» **PLATFORM:** AMSTRAD CPC » **DEVELOPER:** JUAN J MARTÍNEZ » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/DAWN-KERNEL-CPC » **PRICE:** FREE DOWNLOAD, €20-€25 PHYSICAL

The Leonis system is home to a planet called K3R-NL which is in the process of being mined for minerals… or more accurately *was*, because a virus has infected the network, and caused a complete failure of the life support systems. An automated distress beacon was also triggered as the miners made their way to the life pods but, along with the relevant information needed to organise a rescue mission was something else, 12 characters which were buried deep within the message's carrier signal which spelled out "KERNEL LIVES".

This is because the virus that took over K3R-NL's mining complex has actually become sentient in the process and really doesn't play well with others. The base's defences have been pressed into service against anybody who might be attempting to shut the systems down in order to regain control, so all of the automated turrets and motion-triggered surface-to-air missiles will target any small, but manoeuvrable craft which may enter in search of Kernel's system core.

A mining facility also has lots of equipment and those have been reprogrammed as well so it must be avoided, along with the laser grids which kept the local wildlife out – essentially they're sci-fi cattle grids – that obstruct the player. These need to be disabled by destroying the power stations dotted around the map, some of which leave behind supplies of ammo, shield power and screen-clearing nova bombs.

There have been a few comparisons drawn between this and *Cybernoid* but, while *Dawn Of Kernel* does appear to have been influenced by Raffaele Cecco's classic and has a similarly challenging difficulty curve, the action is claustrophobic with less open space to run away from enemies or their projectiles. Each challenge has to be approached in a more cautious and methodical manner and that different tone combined with some excellent graphics and sound throughout makes *Dawn Of Kernel* well worth picking up.

>> Score **93%**



» [Amstrad CPC] These enemies only fire when facing the player, so blast them from behind.



» [Amstrad CPC] All of the items will be helpful, so collect everything you find.

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PICONIAN

» **PLATFORM:** PICO-8 » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DEVELOPER:** AQUOVA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/PICONIAN-PICO8



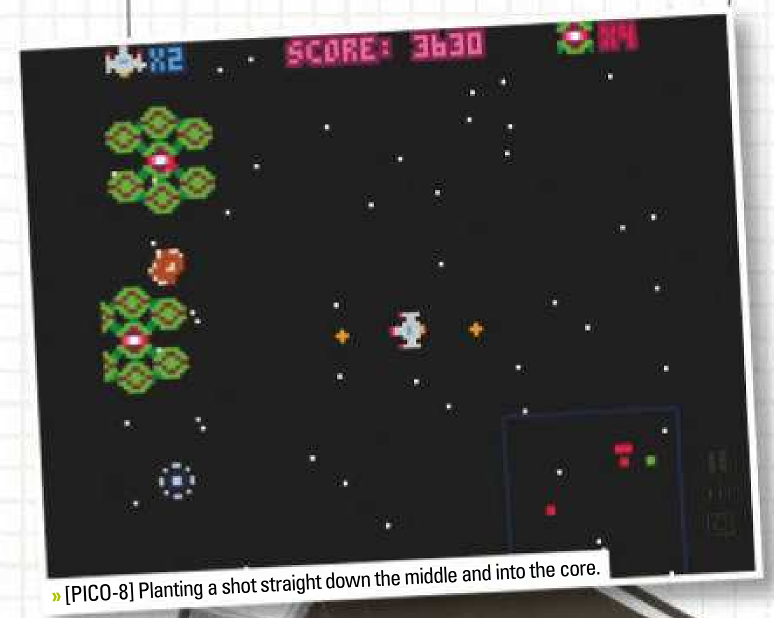
» [PICO-8] Chip away at the defences to earn more points.

You have been tasked by the *Federal Council* with taking down the fleet of orbital platforms being used by the Piconian forces to subjugate the people of Earth. The secrecy of this mission means that just the one craft has been manufactured, but it's fast and reasonably well armed with bidirectional lasers to either blast segments off the platforms until they explode or, if the pilot is skilled enough, place a shot directly into the reactor core.

Piconian is based on the Eighties classics shoot-'em-up *Bosconian*, but some features have been left out. The most important omission are the formations which attack the player to encourage them to clear the stage quickly, and without that sense of urgency the game's longevity suffers.

What's remains is still reasonable and actually quite fun, however it won't hold your attention for a long time compared to either the coin-op or Janusz Chabowski's more recent Atari 8-bit version.

 Score **66%**



» [PICO-8] Planting a shot straight down the middle and into the core.

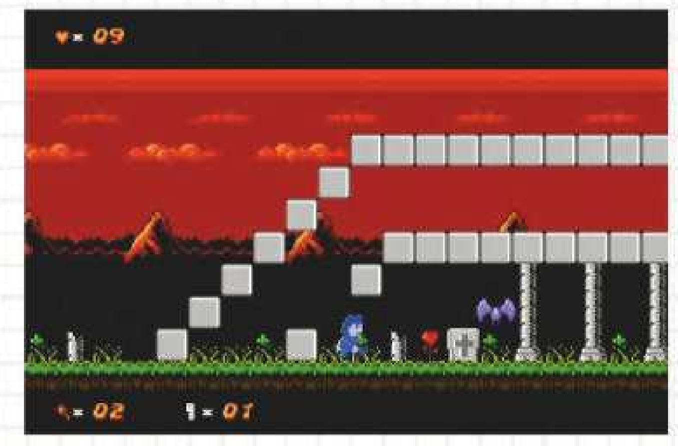
SIR ABABOL

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE AMIGA » **DEVELOPER:** TOM AND BIRRA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/ABABOL-AMIGA » **PRICE:** FREE

Poor Sir Ababol is an 11th century knight who likes the odd crusade, on one such outing he takes a knock to the head, waking to find himself lost and missing his trusty sword. A quick chat with one of the locals sees him pointed towards an eerie-looking waste ground scattered with bright red ababol flowers to collect, but there are creatures of the night roaming around which aren't particularly friendly and the odd portcullis which needs a key to unlock.

There have been a few improvements made as Sir Ababol has evolved from the Spectrum original through to this version which was in turn based on the Mojon Twins' own NES release, but the controls are still rather twitchy which, when paired with the overly enthusiastic and occasionally unfair collision detection, make this game extremely frustrating. This is only for the gamers who like their challenges to be steep.

 Score **65%**



» [Amiga] They may be essential to the plot, but these ababol flowers are also pretty.



ROUNDUP

***Ghosts 'N Goblins* for the C16 is often referred to as one of the worst games on the system – usually with the odd expletive thrown in for good measure – but it's recently been given a second chance with a Plus/4 upgrade by coder Luca Carrafiello that fixes some of the graphical issues and bugs.** Why not give it a go by visiting the link behind Kikstart.me.uk/gng-264.

Released around the same time was a remixed version of Players' budget blaster *Tomcat*, again based on the C16 version but beefed up for the Plus/4. The was developed by Luca back in 2010, this time working together with original developer Darren Broad. It doesn't look like this edition will ever be finished, but we do get to play the work done to date. Kikstart.me.uk/tomcat-264 takes you there.

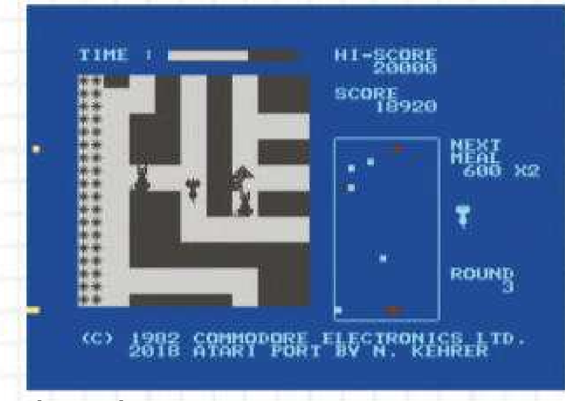
RADAR RAT RACE

» **PLATFORM:** ATARI 8-BIT » **DEVELOPER:** NORBERT KEHRER » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/RAT-RACE-A8 » **PRICE:** FREE

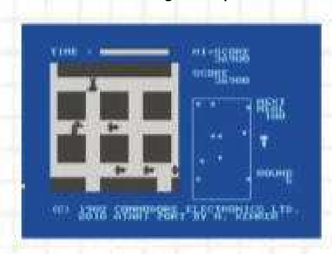
This is one of those games where the title sums everything up quite neatly: the player takes control of a mouse and, with the aid of high-tech radar equipment, must race around a maze in search of cheese while avoiding the pursuing rats and static, but hungry, cats. The game is essentially a version of Namco's *Rally-X* that was written by HAL Laboratory for the VIC-20 and C64, with this Atari 8-bit port from conversion expert Norbert Kehrer being put together based on code from the latter.

The way that the playfield updates is somewhat rough on the eyes – this is inherited from the original, which was a very early release for the platform – but that all-important game design has made it over completely intact including the quite smart AI controlling the rats. Even with the on-screen radar it's still difficult to gather all of the cheese safely.

 Score **82%**



» [Atari 8-bit] Taking on a speedrun level where the rats don't move.





MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**



TEAM PLAYS

PSYCHO SOLDIER



We decided to delve deep into the SNK archives for this month's challenge. Who delivered Athena's most divine performance?

DREW 155,300
I quite enjoy *Psycho Soldier*. A good tip for this one is to let the balloons and spaceships hover for a bit – the longer they're floating about, the more points you get for them.

NICK 133,200
I struggled with this for ages, and thought I was getting worse after each game. But it's not quite as random as it seems – just be wary when you break green eggs, since they occasionally spill out caterpillars.

SAM 125,950
This game is nonsense. Absolute nonsense. Sometimes eggs are full of godlike powers. Sometimes eggs are full of hordes of killer caterpillars. I give up.

DARRAN 75,230
I just can't get on with this. There's too much going on and all the bright colours and explosions are hurting my tired eyes. I do like turning into a bird, mind.

LOW SPEC, HIGH FUN

Hi there,
Just been reading through Nick Thorpe's little article on *Lotus III: The Ultimate Challenge* and couldn't help but pick up the phrase, "Some people baulk at the idea of enjoying games on lesser platforms." A real interesting talking point as I often get stick for this type of thing; often using the conversion rather than the original or playing a NES version of a SNES game.

Anyway, thanks to the boy 'Thorpey' for bringing it up and it may be an interesting article for future issues were you can look at conversions or ports offering much more than the original, for whatever; playability, skill of the programmer or any other reason. I'll get the ball rolling with *Bomb Jack* on the ZX Spectrum being much more fun than the arcade original, a game I can say I've played lots of as I have a *Bomb Jack* arcade machine in my house.

Cheers lads, keep up the great work with the magazine.
Dave McNally



» [PC Engine] Nick's got a Neo-Geo, but he's playing a conversion of this SNK classic.

You're not the only reader we've heard from who felt this way, Dave. It could make for an interesting feature, although there's a little overlap with Pushing The Limits when it comes to things like Bob Pape's excellent Spectrum version of *R-Type*. As for Nick, he's enjoying *Fatal Fury 2* on the PC Engine rather than the Neo-Geo, mostly because he's amazed at just how far the 8-bit hardware could be pushed.

LOOKING BACKWARD

Just wondering what the **Retro Gamer** team's views are on the Xbox One and PlayStation 4's backwards compatibility?

My views are that this increases the library of games for console formats via platforms like Xbox One and PlayStation 4 games, as well as acts as a small stepping stone and goodwill gesture from Microsoft and Sony to developers to encourage them to develop sequels for the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 of popular franchises.

This also allows the newer generations of gamers to be able to enjoy or try games from a previous generation. This even allows the Xbox One/PS4 to upscale some games, bolstering the experience and enjoyment of classics from previous generations.

I currently am enjoying many new Xbox One and PS4 games and some of these games are upscaled. And with the first-gen Xbox games going to be compatible with Xbox One it just keeps getting better and better – not only for both Sony and Microsoft, but for retro gamers who can enjoy classics on the newer generation of gaming systems.
Gareth Willmer

Right now, we prefer Microsoft's approach to backwards compatibility. Although only a limited portion of the Xbox and Xbox 360's libraries work on Xbox

STAR LETTER

CONTINUE SCREEN

Hello,
I've been an avid reader and I was a subscriber up until a couple of years ago when I lost my hands and feet due to pneumonia. You even printed one of my letters in issue 124 where I was talking about the bowling game *10th Frame*. After I was in the hospital eight months I came home and figured out a way to continue playing videogames. I've been playing videogames for 40 years and I really enjoy your magazine.

I started a YouTube channel where I do documentaries on the history of videogames. I do all the writing, editing and publishing myself. I use Dragon NaturallySpeaking to help as well as a trackball for a mouse. The channel is very small as I just started a couple of months ago. It's only at 143 subscribers but feel free to check it out at bit.ly/2O8dStg.

If you are interested to learn more about me and my story you can go to my Patreon page which has a link to a story which my local NBC affiliate did on me. They talk about me still bowling even without hands and feet, my artwork and of course videogames.

www.patreon.com/pdbowl

Thank you for all the years and having such a great magazine.
Patrick Davis

Hi Patrick – we actually remember your previous letter well, as issue 124 was Nick's first Mailbag. We're glad to hear that you've managed to retain your passion for gaming in spite of a life-altering situation, and we hope your YouTube channel takes off.

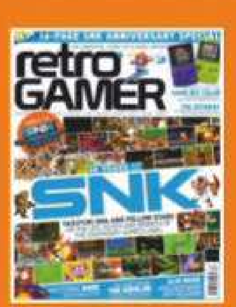
Interestingly enough, your email arrived while the topic of adapted gaming devices was in the forefront of our minds, as an old issue of *PC Zone* we were reading for Back To The Noughties had a feature on how gaming did (and didn't) cater for players with disabilities. We'd encourage any readers with accessibility needs to check out resources like oneswitch.org.uk, as gaming should be a hobby we can all enjoy.



» [C64] Here's the screenshot we ran alongside Patrick's letter way back in issue 124.

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One, those games that do tend to gain a boost from being on more capable hardware, usually a boost in resolution or framerate. Not only that, but the system respects your past purchases.

Sony's system is enormously frustrating. PlayStation 3 compatibility via PlayStation Now is via streaming only, and the selection of PlayStation 2 games (which can now be downloaded as well as streamed via PlayStation Now) is quite limited. Worse yet, there's no way to play the extensive library of original PlayStation games available on PlayStation Network on your PS4. As if all that wasn't enough, there's no support for original discs so you've got to rebuy every game if you want it on your current hardware.

IT'S OLD, NOT CLASSIC

Dear **RG**,

I feel like anyone who is *really* excited about the PlayStation Classic probably hasn't played the PlayStation much recently. The 3D games from that era haven't exactly aged well. Wobbly, warping textures and character models that look like old cereal boxes glued together? No thanks. The games announced so far aren't that great either. *Tekken* and *Ridge Racer* are fine, but *Final Fantasy VII* was overrated and nobody gives a toss about *Jumping Flash!* or *Wild Arms*.

It's even more expensive than the SNES Mini was supposed to be, and will probably triple in price once the scalpers get to it. I look at people rushing to preorder it online and I feel like I'm taking crazy pills.

Brian Dinsmore

Well, we're glad you got that off your chest, Brian. We can understand the excitement though. It's the most popular console to get the plug-and-play treatment so far, by some considerable distance, and we reckon the games actually hold up pretty well, too.



» [Xbox] You can play *Panzer Dragoon* on your Xbox one thanks to Microsoft's backward compatibility commitment.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Magazine of the year

The team was caught by surprise at Future's annual conference in September, when Retro Gamer was named the company's magazine of the year. We're thrilled to have received this award – we all have good fun making the magazine, and we hope you're having just as much fun reading it.





» [PlayStation] We think *Tekken 3*, one of the marquee games for the PlayStation Classic, is still a lot of fun today.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite SNK game?

kiwimike
Metal Slug for me. Not only plays like a charm – but that is pretty much all SNK games – but I love the artwork and gorgeous design.

GaminGeorge
I'm a huge fan of the *Samurai Showdown* series. I feel like it's not just your average fighting game. Skill and strategy plays a key role in landing a massive strike on to your opponent!

Barry Blamalow
Garou: Mark of the Wolves. Criminally underrated. A beautifully animated 2D fighter, deceptively complex yet also simpler to get into than the *King Of Fighters* series.

AMIGArama Podcast
Has to be *Prehistoric Isle*, over the top shooter fun and dinosaurs… what more could you ask for?!

Matt
King Of Fighters '94. In hindsight, it's not the best *KOF*, but it had the most impact. The team system was superb and the step up in quality to other fighters at the time was clear. Also was a great advert for the Neo-Geo CD, with a perfect rearranged soundtrack.

The Laird
I'll go really old school and say *Vanguard*. An incredibly innovative and ground breaking shoot-'em-up that doesn't get the credit it deserves and really set the company on the way to success.



» [Neo-Geo] Matt's a big fan of *The King Of Fighters '94*. We like it, too.

Mister Raroo
Ganbare Neo Poke-Kun. It did *WarioWare* before *WarioWare* even existed.

Alan Mealor
SNK vs Capcom Chaos, one of the best 2D fighters ever made. We had it in the kitchen at Bizarre Creations and it became a staple of late-night crunch time. It's still a great game, good 2D fighters never seem to age.

@zi11ion
Crystalis, the only *Zelda* clone I remember them making.

retro GAMER

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HOW TO...

NAVIGATE JAPANESE MENUS

DIFFICULTY

●●●○○

MEDIUM

HANDY HINTS

» Japanese uses three types of characters. Hiragana characters represent specific phonetic sounds, and are used primarily for Japanese words. Katakana characters are a different representation of the same sounds, and are usually used for loan words from other languages. Kanji characters represent words and phrases – a fluent reader would be expected to know over 2,000 of these.

» Some games use these character sets in non-standard ways. For example, the *Bonk* and *Puyo Puyo* games tend to use hiragana characters exclusively – rendering おぷしょん for the Option menu, where オプション would be more common.

WHY BUY JAPANESE?

While this guide won't get you through RPGs, it'll help you in less text-intensive games – and you could save cash, too...



» **Chocobo Racing** (PlayStation)
PAL PRICE: **£80+**
JAPAN PRICE: **£5+**

» **Keio Flying Squadron 2** (Saturn)
PAL PRICE: **£150+**
JAPAN PRICE: **£85+**

» **Baku Baku** (Saturn)
PAL PRICE: **£18+**
JAPAN PRICE: **£5+**



While Japanese games often feature a surprising amount of English menu text, you might have found yourself stumped by Japanese menu screens. So here's a handy guide to some common words and phrases found in videogames

はい
Yes *[Romanisation: Hai]*

いいえ
No *[Lie]*

キャンセル
Cancel

オプションズ
Options

設定
Settings *[Settei]*

レバー
Lever (joystick)

ボタン
Button

プレイヤ
Player

モード
Mode

メインメニュー
Main menu

メモリーカード
Memory card

システムファイル
System File

» » [Mega Drive] The *Puyo Puyo* series often uses hiragana where katakana would be more common, as seen here



データ
Data

セーブ
Save

ロード
Load

さくじょ or **削除**
Delete *[Sakujo]*

けす or **消す**
Erase *[Kesu]*

上書き
Overwrite *[Uwagaki]*

バックアップ
Backup

ブロック
Block

ポート
Port

ソケット
Socket

バイブレーション
Vibration

振動
Vibration *[Shindou]*

パワー
Power

リプレイ
Replay

サウンド
Sound

ギャラリー
Gallery

ディスク
Disk



» [Dreamcast] We've highlighted an important menu item here – back up, for loading and saving

カートリッジ
Cartridge

カセット
Cassette

えらぶ
Choose *[Erabu]*

選択
Choice *[Sentaku]*

エントリー
Entry

セレクト
Select

けってい or **決定**
Decision *[Kettei]*

もどる or **戻る**
Return (go back) *[Modoro]*

つぎ or **次**
Next *[Tsugi]*

スキップ
Skip

ゲーム
Game

ミニゲーム
Mini-game

体験版
Trial version *[Taikenban]*

Something you'd like to see a guide for? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

WHAT'S NEXT?

Q: Something came up that you haven't covered. Help!
A: We've tried to list most of the common terms we came across, but there's a really handy tip that will get you through many basic menus. If you're observant, you'll notice that there are a huge number of loan words in katakana here. If you take the time to learn katakana using tools like Memrise, Duolingo or Real Kana, you'll be surprised at how many words you recognise afterwards. You can often guess the context from those, even if you're not familiar with anything else.

Q: I'm learning Japanese but I'm struggling with kanji. Are there any games that will help with this?
A: Lots of older games contain little or no kanji. The reason for this is simple: the display resolution of devices like the NES wasn't sufficient to display the complexity and fine detail of many kanji. Additionally, games aimed at a younger audience may have an option for furigana, which is hiragana text positioned above kanji characters. Of course, you'll still need a grasp of Japanese vocabulary and grammar to make any headway with such games.

上
Up *[Jou]*

下
Down *[Shita]*

左
Left *[Hidari]*

右
Right *[Migi]*

パンチ
Punch

キック
Kick

スピード
Speed

ジャンプ
Jump

全 or 善部
All *[Zen or Zenbu]*

たたかう
Fight *[Tatakau]*

まほう
Magic *[Mahou]*

かう or 買う
Buy *[Kau]*

うる or 売る
Sell *[Uru]*

コース
Course

おまけ
Bonus/Extra *[Omake]*

ひとり or 一人
One person *[Hitori]*

ふたり or 二人
Two people [Futari]

つづき or 続き
Continue *[Tsuzuki]*

アーケード
Arcade

オリジナル
Original

サバイバル
Survival

チャレンジ
Challenge

タイムアタック
Time Attack

ネットワーク
Network

かんたん or 簡単
Easy *[Kantan]*

ふつう or 普通
Normal *[Futsu]*

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED...

A selection of smaller questions from readers

SCREEN CLEAN

What's the best way to clean a computer screen?
Matthew Deards via Facebook

When cleaning any electronic device, don't forget to switch it off and unplug it first. Wipe off any dust with a dry, non-abrasive cloth. Then apply a cleaning solution to a new cloth and work your way across the screen with it, being careful not to apply undue pressure. Once it's clean, wipe it over with a dry cloth and let it dry.

TIME TO SWITCH

Why doesn't anyone keep SCART switcher boxes of a decent size? I've got loads of three-way ones all connected up, it would be nice to have a better way of connecting loads of retro consoles.
Tristan Baker via Facebook

Unfortunately, SCART is becoming an obsolete connection standard thanks to the ubiquity of HDMI. However, we are aware of some large capacity automatic SCART switchers made for gaming purposes. The snappily named 'gscartsw' is available from gretrostuff.com for $220 and has eight inputs and two outputs, as well as additional sync features. The Hydra range from lotharek.pl starts from 439 Polish złoty and offers anywhere from five to 16 inputs, one or two outputs and can be expanded with additional Hydra Head units.

PARENT TRAP

I'd like to know how I can continue playing on my PS4 in between looking after a newborn baby without having to keep the console and TV switched on all day?!
GameRaiderOfficial via Twitter

Teamwork is the key here. If you have access to the other parent, you may request that they take charge of baby duties while you game, allowing you to turn off the console when you tag in and take back the little human. Nick finds that being single means that he has never acquired offspring and is in no danger of doing so, and is thus free to play games uninterrupted, but you may feel this is rather too drastic.



» A good old combo of screen cleaner and cloth will see that smudges and other blemishes will be banished from your screens.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

TURTLES NES BUNDLE

"This was the NES variant I had as a kid. Truth be told I was slightly disappointed with the original *Turtles* game because I used to hammer the four-player arcade cab, so to play this alien turtles game was tough at first, but then I really learned to love it."

PAID: £1,500

MEGA MAN X3

"I found out that *Mega Man X3* had the shortest run of any PAL release, 10,000 copies only, so to find a nice copy was going to be a task and a half. I managed to procure a copy in 2016 but [its condition] wasn't great, so I sold it and carried on searching. Then this year I managed to get an amazing copy."

PAID: £2,300

BIO

NAME:
Karl Taylor

ESTIMATED SIZE:
224 games

ESTIMATED COST:
£40,000

BEGAN COLLECTING:
2014

FAVOURITE GAME:
Mega Man 2

INSTAGRAM:
Mint3ndo

A PAL FOR LIFE

Karl Taylor tells us about his love for Nintendo

When we speak to numerous collectors they often tend to have a goal and Karl's is one we've heard many times before and even indulged in ourselves. "My focus was to collect the entire PAL library of SNES carts, but it came to a point where I was becoming exhausted and it basically consumed me," he tells us.

Karl decided to hit the breaks and put a copy of *Vampire's Kiss* on eBay. The move not only helped refocus his collection (which began four years ago) but also led to a friendship with fellow collector, Justin Hickman. "One guy messaged me in regards to checking it out," Karl recalls. "We made some small talk before getting down to this *Castlevania* cart he so desired and then I presented it to him. He looked very disappointed and asked to borrow some polish and kitchen roll, which left me completely perplexed." Justin's sharp eye and use of cleaning products had revealed the cartridge was fake and Karl got his first lessons in one of the more disappointing aspects of collecting – counterfeit games. "Needless to say he left empty-handed, but we formulated an amazing relationship and we speak to each other virtually every day now about collecting," Karl tells us.

Karl might no longer being going for a complete collection, but he still has a passion and love for Nintendo's consoles. "I focus mainly on NES/SNES because I had those systems as a youngster," he explains. "I spent hours holding the pads and they still fit like a glove to this day." Those early experiences also mean he's a proud PAL collector, and has no interest in collecting anything else. "PAL is what I knew as a kid and I wasn't really aware of any differences until I started to dig deeper," he continues. "It has actually dawned on me whether NTSC would have been a better road to go down, but it's not just about the gameplay for me, it's about having the whole item, and let's be honest, NTSC boxes look horrendous compared to their beautiful PAL counterparts. Famicom on the other hand…" That aesthetic beauty is important to Karl because he's very keen on ensuring his items are in as good condition as possible. "I want to preserve them as best as I can, so I don't play any of the 'physical' games I collect as they are for display only. I have a modded SNES Mini and NES mini, so I jump on and still play them."

So what advice would Karl give to other would-be retro game collectors? "Pick something that means something to you," he concludes. "It's very easy to



ZELDA NES GAMES

"I remember being absolutely amazed seeing 'gold' carts, they were so different and the fact that you got a glimpse before you even took them out of the sleeve was cool. The beginning of one the greatest game franchises in history."

PAID: £2,500 (Zelda 1)
£200 (Zelda II)

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com



DUCK TALES LUNCHBOX
"A game I hold in huge regard, as I had it as a kid and absolutely adored it. The numbered AP (artist proof) package comes with a beautiful gold cart that works, instructions, extra promotional leaflets and is held together with shredded dollar bills. A really incredible item."
PAID: £1,500

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SECRET OF MANA

■ "This is in incredible condition and is seriously difficult to find in the condition because of the cardboard used. It's my favourite ever Super Nintendo game."

PAID: £600

get wrapped up in collecting something because you're bored or because everyone else is doing it. And don't let it consume you. It's extremely easy to become addicted to buying anything, so it's very important to have a focus point and stick to it. I've witnessed too many people spend money they haven't got because they are in too deep."

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

HARDWARE HUNT NEO-GEO CONSOLE



The best retro way to experience SNK's glory days is to get a Neo-Geo AES. You can pick up an unboxed system with a single joystick for around £200, but a boxed copy will cost **£400+** depending on condition. A cheaper way (at least from a games point of view) is to get a CD-based system, where prices start **from £120.**

THE EIDOLON

Lucasfilm's adventure is rising in price depending on what version you're after. The Atari 8-bit version fetches around £40, where we've seen the Apple II outing reach as **much as £80**. The Amstrad, Commodore 64 and ZX Spectrum versions sell for between **£3-£15** depending on the variant in question.

JUMPING FLASH



The PlayStation launch game is readily available and can be found for **around the £20 mark**. The Japanese version is cheaper still and can be picked up for under a tenner.

GYNOUG



The Japanese version of this shoot-'em-up can go as high as £40. A PAL copy usually fetches between **£15-£25**. The harder to find *Wings Of Wor* Genesis variant can go for **as much as £80**.

THE GETAWAY



Team Soho's London-set *Grand Theft Auto* challenger pops up quite often on eBay for anything between **£2 and £5**. The same goes for its sequel, *Black Monday*. In general, now is a pretty good time to collect for PS2 games, as you can expect these kinds of prices for a lot of the more popular, widely circulated games.

HOW MUCH?! SUPER SIDEKICKS 4



If you want some bidding drama than a SNK game is usually the best place to find it. One of the most recent examples was a copy of SNK's fourth football game for the Neo-Geo, which had 15 bidders driving up the price to a whopping **£5,388.24**.

Prices correct at time of print

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nextmonth

ON SALE 29 NOVEMBER 2018



How BioWare rebooted Dungeons & Dragons for a whole new generation

ALSO INSIDE...

Fantasy World Dizzy, Toki, Spyro The Dragon, Bit Studios, Kevin Edwards, Neo-Geo Mini, The Count, Trespasser: The Lost World, Minority Report: Gamate and much more

ENDGAME



MARIO KART 64

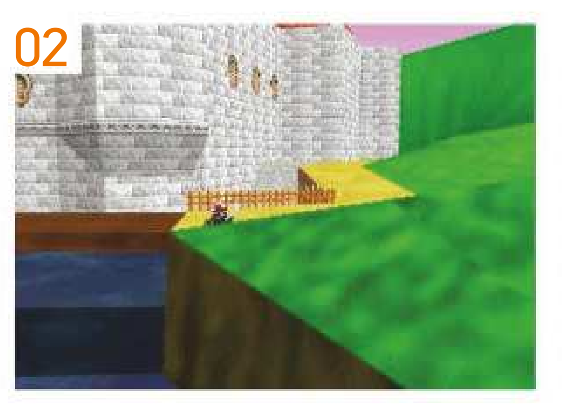
» If you ever want a spot of family-friendly racing fun, a Mario Kart game is usually a great choice. Between the charming cast of characters and chaotic item system that gives everyone a chance to win, it's a party hit. But in single-player mode, with nobody to trash talk and vicious rubber-banding AI, things aren't always so fun. Let's see if Toad can overcome all that adversity to claim victory

01



» As balloons rain from the sky, Toad is not in a tremendously happy state. The mood is celebratory at Peach's castle, but the smaller than average (but not freakishly small) racer won't get to claim the first place trophy he really wanted.

02



» The mushroom-headed racer's downfall came when a stray lightning bolt struck him, causing him to fall behind the pack. "If only it hadn't been stormy, I'd be much happier now," he thinks to himself as he drives to the podium.

03



» Still, at least he's claiming his trophy in front of the biggest ever *Mario Kart* crowd. That's not true, of course – there's nobody there. But when Toad feels bad about himself he uses counter-factual thinking as a coping mechanism.



04

» It wasn't the most impressive race he'd ever run, but Toad clearly no longer shares that opinion. With a triumphant cry of, "I'm the best," he celebrates his third place finish as if he's clutching gold, basking in the wholly imagined admiration of the spectators and his fellow racers.



05

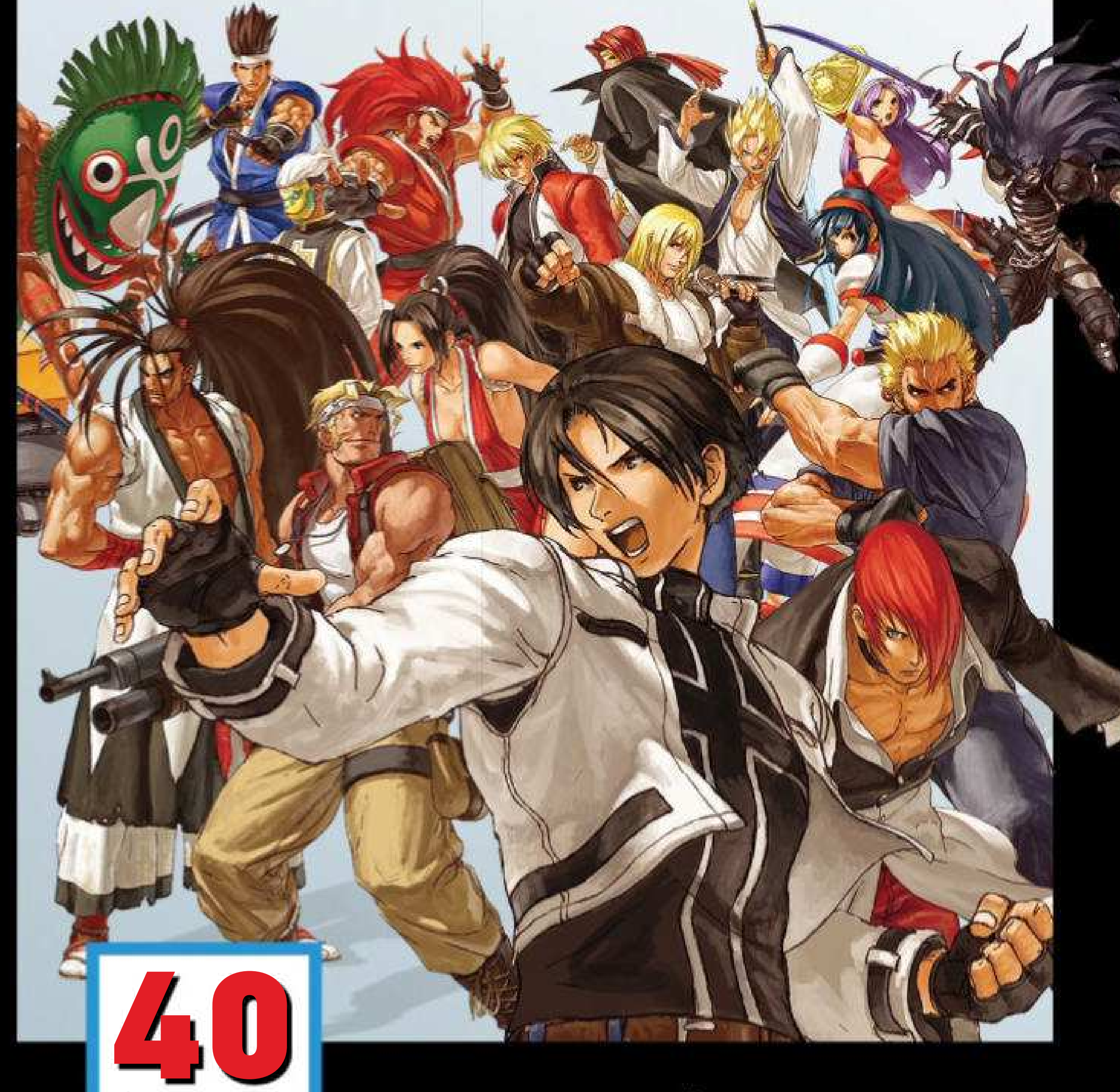
» Within hours, Toad is angrily tweeting that the "fake news media" don't understand racing results, and that he had in fact won a record-breaking victory. These delusional rants seem to bring him some measure of comfort, but to the rest of the world Toad just looks like a dick.


OLD!
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES
retro GAMER
MASTERING
NARC
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO WILLIAMS' BRUTALLY BLOODY RUN-AND-GUN
SNK
40th ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION
HOW DIGITAL ECLIPSE IS BRINGING SNK'S HITS TO A NEW GENERATION
+ 40 YEARS OF SNK
GAME BOY COLOR | THE GETAWAY | GYNOUG | THE EIDOLON

THE MINI SNK COMPANION

OVER THE PAGE...

THE MINI SNK COMPANION



40 GAMES

1-2 PLAYERS

retro GAMER

A RETRO TITAN

I've had a lifelong relationship with SNK games that continues to this day. I first discovered the releases of Shin Nihon Kikaku Corporation in my local arcade, Quay Amusements in Poole, where I discovered the likes of *Vanguard*, *Athena* and *Ikari Warriors*. Somewhat predictably, it was *Prehistoric Isle* that left the biggest impression on me and I would play it religiously whenever I visited Poole. In fact, when I briefly owned my own original arcade machine it became the first JAMMA board I owned.

SNK's next hardware evolution, the Neo-Geo, was arguably its most popular and it not only delivered astonishing arcade experiences, but managed to replicate the experience in the home thanks to its expensive AES console. It was too much money for me at the time, but I'd always play on the demo unit whenever I headed off to the Videogames Centre to buy the latest Mega Drive or SNES games.

It's roughly 35 years since I first discovered those early SNK games and it's now even easier to relive those cherished arcade memories thanks to the sheer amount of Neo-Geo games on modern systems and the incoming release of *SNK Anniversary Collection*. With that in mind we've put together a selection of essential games, many of which are currently available that you really should experience if you have any interest in SNK.

Enjoy the guide!

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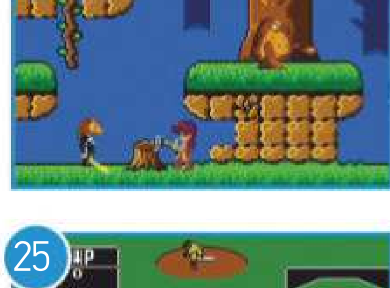

07

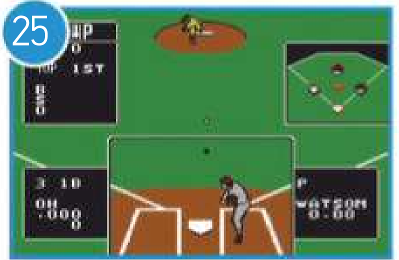

20
HIT
COM INSERT COIN
27
TERRY BOGARD
power


31


15
LIFE
FORCE


HIGH
47000
2P BUTTON


08


25

METAL SLUG

COMIC **CARNAGE**

NEO-GEO, 1996

Nazca Corporation only made two games before being absorbed into SNK, and while both are Neo-Geo classics, it's clearly *Metal Slug* that had the bigger long-term impact. The team already had experience in creating a run-and-gun game (many had previously worked on *Gunforce 2* at Irem), and *Metal Slug* was very well designed as a result. It's a great example of a game that's tough but fair, as most players will need a lot of practice just to see the second boss, but the very best can beat it without losing a life.

Metal Slug's cartoon visuals and jazzy tunes are great, but one of the game's more unexpected qualities is its appealing sense of humour. Everything about the game is over-the-top – enemies scream and flee in terror when they see you coming, POWs flash big grins as they're rescued, and you can command a *jumping tank*. You can't help but wear a smile on your face while playing.

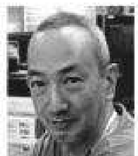


» [Neo-Geo] *Metal Slug*'s shotgun is one of the most powerful and satisfying weapons in gaming.



Q&A: **KAZUHIRO TANAKA**

Metal Slug's designer looks back at SNK's original run-and-gun hit



Where did the original idea for *Metal Slug* originate?
To start off, the characters Marco and Tarma did not exist in the very first plans of the game. In the original concept, tanks were supposed to fight against other tanks. However, after some discussion, we thought the game would not be that interesting in the end, and decided to make the tanks armoured vehicle power-ups that could take out enemies in a single hit.

Why do you get power-ups from POWs?
By obtaining something from saving people, we thought that it would give more sense to the meanings of 'saving' and 'being saved'. We thought that the personality of the POWs wouldn't have been the same if they were just 'numbers' to be counted.

The game is very funny, how important was this humour during development?
I think that humour was the main axis of the game in all points, not only on the characters, but also in every movement and details in the backgrounds to create a unique game atmosphere.

What were the biggest challenges you faced while making *Metal Slug*?
I would say when we had to change expressions and movements within the space of a few pixels. The number of colours that could be used per character was limited, and we put a lot of efforts and mastered every dot pixel in order to accomplish this task.

Why do you think *Metal Slug* spawned so many sequels?
Every time we worked on a new *Metal Slug*, we extended the game world by adding a large variety of characters and enemies including new themes such as insects and plants, and eventually even ended up in space... but I would say that the support from players over the years was no doubt the biggest reason.

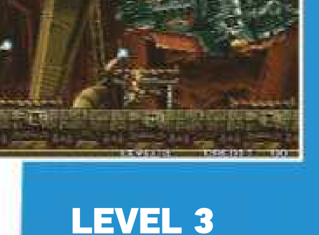
BOSS RUSH

Meet the over-armed contraptions you're tasked with destroying

LEVEL 1

■ This massive monstrosity has a huge laser cannon that'll vaporise you, but its enormous bulk makes it completely immobile and easy to take down.





LEVEL 2

■ Morden's plane is capable of nasty bombing runs and has an unpredictable missile guidance system. He even shows up with a rocket launcher himself.

LEVEL 3

■ This giant tank has an enormous cannon turret, dual-Gatling turrets and can even launch landmines. The worst part of it all? It's slow, but it's definitely mobile.





LEVEL 4

■ What's worse than one boss? Two bosses. These tanks are individually small, but as a combined force they leave you with pretty much nowhere to run.

LEVEL 5

■ This contraption can track your position and launch arc shots, but the danger comes when it's damaged - it will rise up on legs to reveal a deadly flamethrower.





LEVEL 6

■ Morden's helicopter doesn't look like the deadliest vehicle, but it's agile and packs firepower, including a very nasty carpet bombing capability.

SNK VS CAPCOM: CARD FIGHTERS CLASH

ALRIGHT THEN, **ONE MORE GO...**

NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR, 1999

If you needed further proof of the brilliance of SNK's card battler, just know that Nick and Darran have sunk over 250 hours into it between them. We're always loathe to use the word 'addictive' when describing videogames, but there's something about *Clash*'s moreish card skirmishes that causes one game to become ten and ten games becomes, 'Oh my god, is that the actual time?'

The real beauty of *Card Fighters Clash* is that it's not only an exceptionally crafted game with stunning art, it's also a glorious celebration of two companies that were once fierce rivals. The game is full of little nods to both SNK and Capcom and there are two versions of the game, which are geared towards each company and feature exclusive starting decks. While its story mode offers some challenging AI battles, It truly comes alive when you link up and play against someone else. Just don't play against Nick. It won't end well for you…

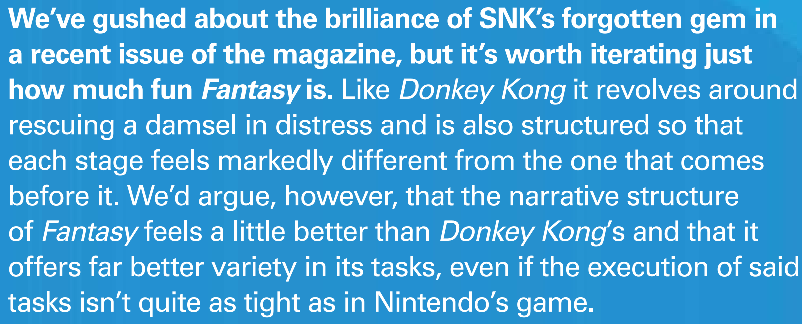


» [Neo-Geo Pocket Color] Try *Clash* at your own peril: before you know it, it will have swallowed all your free time.









FANTASY

UNDERRATED **GEM**

ARCADE, 1981

We've gushed about the brilliance of SNK's forgotten gem in a recent issue of the magazine, but it's worth iterating just how much fun *Fantasy* is. Like *Donkey Kong* it revolves around rescuing a damsel in distress and is also structured so that each stage feels markedly different from the one that comes before it. We'd argue, however, that the narrative structure of *Fantasy* feels a little better than *Donkey Kong*'s and that it offers far better variety in its tasks, even if the execution of said tasks isn't quite as tight as in Nintendo's game.

Play through *Fantasy* today and it's hard not to be impressed by the sheer amount of game that SNK was able to cram into it. One minute you're desperately trying to land your hot air balloon on a pirate ship, the next you're attempting to lure angry natives in front of canons, or desperately outrunning a tiger (to the tune of *Funky Town* no less). It's extremely well-thought-out and there's a real sense of accomplishment when you're finally reunited.

LASSO

FRONTIER **LIFE**

ARCADE, 1982

Here's another early SNK game that's just bristling with fun ideas. Life on a ranch isn't easy and it's particularly trying for the protagonist of *Lasso*. Not only does he have to corral a set number of animals on each stage, but he also has to deal with a large number of wolves. Add in a number of scattered inanimate objects, as well as a fire-breathing dragon (at least that's what we think it is) and your hero's task becomes very hard indeed.

Lassoing animals takes a while to master, as you'll first need to flick your rope out with a press of the fire button and then stab it again in order to catch a critter. Catch them all and you'll head to the next, trickier stage. You can also clear levels by shooting a set number of wolves, meaning *Lasso* is quite nicely structured in how you complete your overall objective.



ATHENA

A GODLIKE **HERO**

ARCADE, 1986

Athena is one of SNK's most notable early characters, going on to appear in *Psycho Soldier* and numerous fighting games such as *NeoGeo Battle Coliseum*. Her debut self-titled game remains an interesting hodgepodge of mechanics, cleverly straddling both the platformer and action genres, whilst also throwing in some neat RPG systems for good measure. Bright and colourful and with an incessantly cheerful tone, it's little wonder Athena became such a flagship character in the company's early days.





SHOCK TROOPERS

SHOCK AND **AWESOME!**

NEO-GEO, 1997

One of the best aspects of this run-and-gun is just how much longevity it offers. Not only are there three routes through the game to take, but the eight available heroes are also vastly unique in the way they play, meaning playing through the game with each offers its own challenges. Add in the option of either tackling the game with one character or switching on a whim between three, and it quickly becomes obvious why *Shock Troopers* is held in such high esteem.

PULSTAR

PULSING WITH **NON-STOP ACTION**

NEO-GEO, 1995

There's a reason Aicom's challenging shooter feels like an enhanced update of *R-Type* – it's largely made by the same team of talented developers. While *Pulstar* features a similar aesthetic to Irem's biomechanical shooter – albeit with distinctive prerendered visuals – it does build on *R-Type*'s design with additions like being able to destroy your orb in exchange for a powerful one-off shot, and the ability to switch between rapid-firing and more powerful charged shots. *Pulstar* also remains incredibly challenging, so you'll need exceptional skills (or plenty of credits) to reach its final stage.







CHOPPER 1

OLD-SCHOOL **COOL**

ARCADE, 1988

This shoot-'em-up doesn't do much to reinvent the wheel but it remains a refreshingly old-school blaster that holds up well in a genre that's now obsessed with negotiating waves and waves of intricate bullet patterns. In addition to a satisfying selection of power-ups to master, the landscape can be just as much a problem to deal with as enemies, meaning you'll often have to manoeuvre your way around rock outcrops or punch holes through otherwise impassable walls to continue.



NAM-1975

COMBAT **LEVELS UP**

NEO-GEO, 1990

SNK's first release for its Neo-Geo hardware still holds up exceptionally well today. At its heart *Nam-1975* is riffing off older classics such as *Shootout*, *Cabal* and *Dynamite Duke*, but it adds enough of its own ideas, along with an insane amount of pyrotechnics to stand proudly on its own two feet. Although *Nam-1975* doesn't push the Neo-Geo hardware, it remains an action-packed game thanks to its solid mechanics (you can't fire and move at the same time) varied arsenal of weaponry and the sheer assault your poor soldier come under.

NEOGEO BATTLE COLISEUM

A KILLER **CROSSOVER CLASH**

ARCADE, 2005

SNK has never been afraid to revisit its past in order to create a good beat-'em-up and *Coliseum* ups the ante by adding a number of notable ADK characters. Fuelled by Atomiswave hardware, it's a solid two-on-two tag battle brawler with a focus on survival battles, which reward you by either giving you more energy, time or an increase to your power gauge. Surprisingly inventive and with a large roster of recognisable characters, *Coliseum* continued to prove that SNK hadn't lost its knack for creating fun fighters.



FATAL FURY SPECIAL

LEGACY OF THE **HUNGRY WOLF**

NEO-GEO, 1993

SNK was not averse to revisiting and polishing its earlier games, and *Fatal Fury Special* is one of the best examples of the company doing just that. It builds on the already enjoyable *Fatal Fury 2* by adding several extra characters (including its four bosses and three characters from the first game), brand-new stages and tweaked movesets for each of the available combatants. Not only that, but by including *Art Of Fighting*'s Ryo Sakazaki it became the first SNK fighting game to feature a crossover character, paving the way for the likes of *The King Of Fighters* and *NeoGeo Battle Coliseum*. Special by name, special by nature.



» [Neo-Geo] Not content with delivering on the already-excellent *Fatal Fury 2*, SNK polished it even further.

Q&A: **YASUYUKI ODA**

The veteran Fatal Fury developer looks back at the series



How did the two-line battle system come about?

At that time, 3D games were not the mainstream. Adding another fighting background and solid expressions were factors that had made the *Fatal Fury* series such a success.

What made Geese Howard so popular?

In his first appearance in *Fatal Fury*, he was the stereotype of a 'Godfather'-type character with some influences from the Japanese culture. Then, players were able to select him in *Fatal Fury Special*, and he gained a stable popularity. Geese and Billy were created by designers specialised for these two characters.

Why is *Fatal Fury Special* so loved by fans?

Fatal Fury Special was the first SNK fighting game to take account of versus battles. The fighting game genre was about to become mainstream in the Japanese arcade game market at that time and *Fatal Fury* rode that wave as well. In addition to this, the game had a huge roster for the time as well as stages and sound effects and music of high quality.

Why did you introduce a character from *Art Of Fighting*?

Bringing Ryo Sakazaki to the *Fatal Fury Series* from *Art Of Fighting* was a great idea. Although we were planning to keep Ryo's appearance secret until the game release, Ryo was announced on a huge screen at Tokyo Game Show. That moment was too awkward for me.

Tell us about the ring-out system.

The ring-out system in *Real Bout Fatal Fury* received positive impressions from our fans. However, we added later a new system in *Real Bout Fatal Fury Special*. As *Real Bout Fatal Fury Special*'s focus was versus battles, we decided to remove the system that would lead to accidental falls and not be liked by fans.

Why was Terry Bogard updated for *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*?

Terry's design was becoming quite classical at the time of developing *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*. We also wanted to show an older and peaceful Terry by changing his outfit.



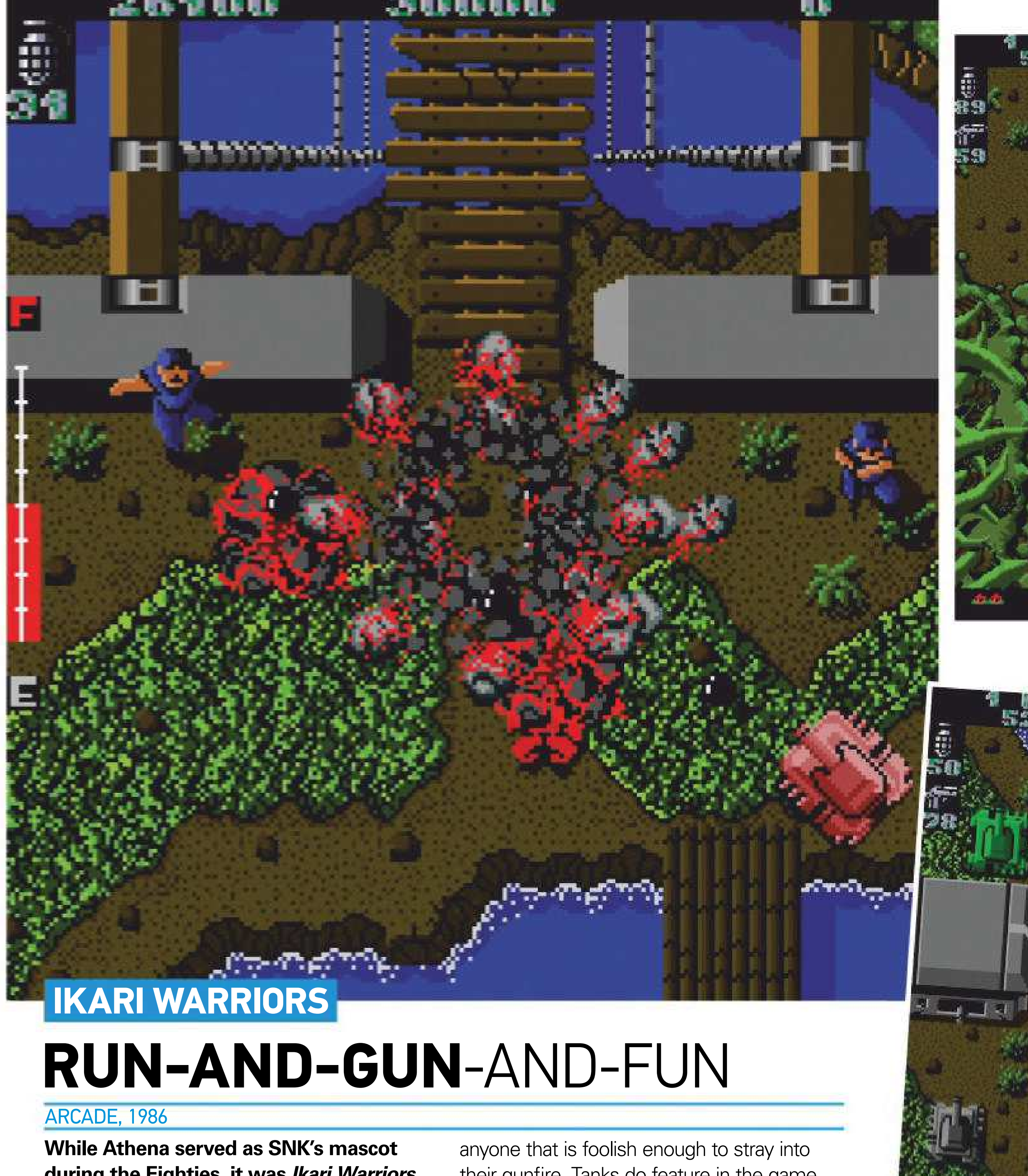
TWINKLE STAR SPRITES

A **KILLER** CUTE-'EM-UP

NEO-GEO, 1996

This competitive shoot-'em-up was published by SNK, with ADK on developing duties. It's an excellent spin on the traditional shooter and becomes an incredible time waster thanks to its balanced mechanics and constant "just one more go" factor. Effectively you're shooting down waves of enemies like in any other shooter, but destroying them here sends them over to your opponent who must either avoid them and send them back. It all adds up to one of the craziest games of tennis you're ever likely to play.





IKARI WARRIORS

RUN-AND-GUN-AND-FUN

ARCADE, 1986

While Athena served as SNK's mascot during the Eighties, it was *Ikari Warriors* that proved to be one of the company's biggest hits in the west. In many ways this run-and-gun is an evolution of the mechanics found in *TNK III*, which also utilises rotary joysticks to let players independently move and fire. Whereas SNK's earlier game saw you controlling a tank, here the action takes place on foot with your Rambo lookalikes storming up the screen and mowing down anyone that is foolish enough to stray into their gunfire. Tanks do feature in the game, of course, and Ralf and Clark can leap into them to increase their firepower and gain protection for a bit of time. *Ikari Warriors*' biggest competition on its release arguably came from Capcom's *Commando*, but SNK's blockbuster title effortlessly improves on the overhead run-and-gun setup thanks to its aforementioned tank mechanics and the inclusion of co-operative gameplay.

» [Arcade] You spend a lot of time fighting your way through the jungle on foot, but you can also hop into a tank.

» [Arcade] Soldiers will come at Ralf and Clark from all angles, so keep an eye out for stray enemy bullets.

IKARI WANDERERS

The further adventures of Ralf and Clark

VICTORY ROAD



■ Despite adding copious amounts of sampled voiceovers and a large selection of new weapons, the sequel to *Ikari Warriors* plays exactly as you might expect. Aside from the new weapons and taunting enemies, the biggest change is the new science fiction style as Ralf and Clark are transported into the future.

IKARI III: THE RESCUE



■ The third game in the *Ikari* series is quite a departure from the other instalments, essentially taking the form of an overhead scrolling beat-'em-up. There's still the opportunity to pick up weapons and spray the screen with hot lead, but there's a far greater emphasis on hand-to-hand combat.

THE KING OF FIGHTERS SERIES

■ Ralf and Clark applied all the knowledge they learned from beating up bad guys in *Ikari III* and ended up becoming competitors in SNK's popular crossover series. The duo has appeared in every game, and over the years have been joined by companions, Heidern, Leona and Whip.

SVC: CARD FIGHTERS' CLASH



■ This is more of a cameo appearance, but it's still worthy of a mention as it's such an incredibly fun game. While neither *Ikari* character is playable in *Card Clash*, each of them does have their own Top Trumps-styled cards that you can add to your deck.

METAL SLUG SERIES



■ The *Ikari* team's soldier-slaying prowess makes it a perfect fit to feature in the *Metal Slug* franchise, and Ralph and Clark play very differently from the rest of the characters featured in *Metal Slug 6*. Ralf is great for beginners, as he takes two hits to kill. Both characters also feature in *Metal Slug 7*.



ART OF FIGHTING

FAMILY **FEUD**

NEO-GEO, 1993

***Art Of Fighting* introduces Ryo Sakazaki and Robert Garcia, who are searching for Ryo's kidnapped sister Yuri by brawling their way across Southtown.** The game was a graphical showcase for the Neo-Geo hardware, distinguished by its fullscreen scaling and huge sprites that gained visible injuries as the brutal fights progressed. *Art Of Fighting* also introduced a unique system that limited the use of special moves via the 'Spirit Gauge'. Unusually, the Super Nintendo conversion of *Art Of Fighting* featured some significant new additions to the game, most notably the hidden, ultra-powerful Desperation Moves which would feature prominently in later SNK fighting games.

» [Neo-Geo] *Art Of Fighting* was a technical marvel upon its 1993 debut, and it still impresses today.

Q&A: **YOICHIRO SOEDA**

The Art Of Fighting artist looks back at the popular series



Why does *Art Of Fighting* have a strong emphasis on story?
It is because *Art Of Fighting* was developed as a game turning around an evolving storyline rather than a traditional fighting game. The game's story progresses as players beat opponents. In order to emphasise the more dramatic aspects of the game storyline, *Art Of Fighting* features numerous dialogue scenes between characters, and cutscenes between stage transitions. At the beginning of the game development, only Ryo and Robert were planned as playable characters, but after some changes, we decided to allow more characters to be playable in versus battles.

Unlike many fighters, *Art Of Fighting* limits your use of special moves. How did you reach this design decision?
These conditions have been designed in order to emphasise the powerful and exceptional aspect of those moves. The ideas of charging your own Spirit gauge, and lowering the opponent's by taunting them were decided from the early stages of the development.

***Art Of Fighting* has a famous ending, which cuts off as Yuri is about to reveal the identity of the masked villain Mr Karate. We later discover that he is actually Ryo and Yuri's father, Takuma Sakazaki. Why was this ending chosen, and was Takuma always planned as the man under the mask?**
It was decided from the early development stage that Takuma Sakazaki was planned to be the guy behind the mask. The Tengu mask was also decided at the very beginning of the game design. We actually took the chance to explain why Takuma Sakazaki became Mr Karate when we developed the SNES port of *Art Of Fighting*.



CRYSTALIS

POST-APOCALYPTIC **SWORDS AND SORCERY**

NES, 1990

On a console like the NES, it's hard to make an action RPG that can draw attention away from the obvious choices, but SNK managed with *Crystalis*. This game is set in a post-apocalyptic world at the end of the 21st Century, which has been overrun by mutated creatures following a global nuclear war in 1997. Enter the hero, a man awoken from stasis after a century in order to bring peace to the world. With four elemental swords, some magic and the help of the four sages, it's his job to make it happen.

Crystalis was able to stand out amongst its contemporaries thanks to its excellent graphical presentation and a plot that was unusually advanced – especially in its translated form, which is one of the better localisations of an 8-bit console game. It's also got some classic SNK cameos from Athena and Kensou of *Psycho Soldier*, and Nintendo even licensed the game for a Game Boy Color remake in 2000.

WINDJAMMERS

FLYING **POWER DISCS**

NEO-GEO, 1994

Developed by Data East and originally published by SNK, this sports game is a multiplayer classic that has experienced a resurgence in popularity in recent years. Your task is simply to throw a frisbee past your opponent and into one of the goal's scoring zones – first to 12 points wins. The two-button control scheme suggests simplicity, but there's a wealth of advanced techniques and special moves for individual characters that separate the novices from the masters of the flying power disc.

THE KING OF FIGHTERS XIII

2D **TO DIE FOR**

ARCADE, 2010

Though the *King Of Fighters* series has now adopted 3D visuals as standard, we'll always have a soft spot for the final 2D version. SNK has always been known for its phenomenal sprite work, and this game is a visual treat with gorgeous HD characters and backgrounds. It's also a tremendously well balanced and enjoyable fighting game, which was featured at the Evolution Championship Series from 2011 to 2014 and provided many of the most exciting moments in those tournaments.





SNK VS CAPCOM: MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM

CROSSOVER **CLASSIC**

NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR, 1988

The Neo-Geo Pocket Color wasn't short on good fighting games, but this one is arguably the best. The combination of two sets of iconic characters is obviously appealing, but the technical achievement of getting a fully featured tag team fighting game running on handheld hardware is amazing – and single battles and *KOF*-style team battles are available as alternatives. It also had a great selection of minigames, and could even link up with *Capcom Vs SNK* on the Dreamcast.



RAGE OF THE DRAGONS

PAYING HOMAGE TO A **CLASSIC**

NEO-GEO, 2002

Developed jointly by Evoga and Noise Factory and published by Playmore, this tag-team fighting game paid tribute to the *Double Dragon* series, as evidenced by the inclusion of a hulking mid-boss called Abubo and brothers named Billy and Jimmy. It's very stylish and as mechanically rich as you'd hope for a fighting game of its era, though it is a little unbalanced. What's more, it's a real Neo-Geo exclusive – the game was never released on any other hardware.

SONIC POCKET ADVENTURE

EXPERT PET SITTER

NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR, 1999

While Sonic might be Sega's de facto mascot, his appearance on the Neo-Geo Pocket Color was developed by SNK itself, and the result was a fantastic entry in the series that combined familiarity and innovation. While the music and level graphics were adapted from the Mega Drive hits, the all-new level layouts were up there with the best in the series. What's more, the addition of hidden puzzle pieces provided a reward that encouraged players to fully explore each stage.



SENGOKU 2

LOST IN TIME

NEO-GEO, 1993

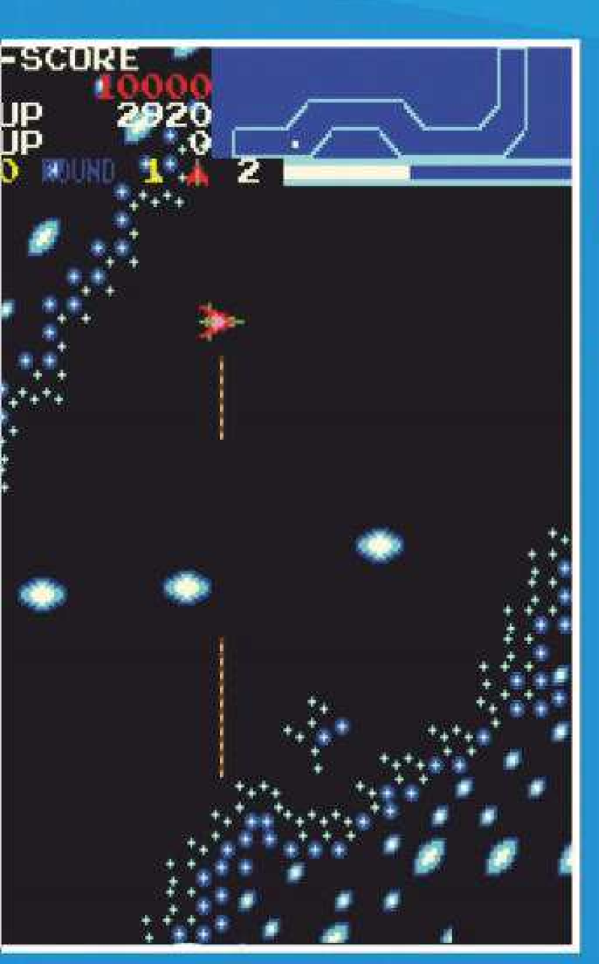
They say that variety is the spice of life, and *Sengoku 2* is one varied beat-'em-up, as well as a polished improvement over the original game. After foiling an invasion of the modern world by spirits of the past, the heroes of the first game aren't finished, as a priestess tells them of a new danger. This time, an evil warlord wants to conquer the world by using time travel to ensure his victory at various important historical events, which means it's time to travel to the past and beat up everyone in sight.

As before, you're given some magical transformation powers, neat combination attacks and mercifully, the ability to block enemy attacks. You'll even get the chance to perform some mounted combat, as horseback riding is a part of the game. What's particularly exciting is the way that you don't just stroll through scrolling stages, but also get teleported to various locations, ensuring a constant stream of new sights.



» [Neo-Geo] *Sengoku 2* takes the usual beat-'em-up formula and adds in new flourishes to keep things exciting.





VANGUARD

ADVANCED **ATTACK**

ARCADE, 1981

This shoot-'em-up was one of SNK's first big arcade hits, back in the early Eighties. It's quite an exciting game, too – as well as being able to shoot four ways using a four-button layout, the game offered an ever-changing landscape of colourful zones to shoot your way through. Excitingly, these included stages which scrolled diagonally as well as the standard horizontal scrolling stages, enabling new attack formations which really tested your multidirectional firing skills.

Of course, it's not an easy game as there are plenty of enemies to fight your way through, and their firepower can cut through your own. That's why the game's best moments are those that come after you've managed to guide your ship through an energy chamber. Not only do you gain temporary invincibility, allowing you to ram through enemy ships, but the music changes to a heroic theme (taken from *Flash Gordon*) that makes you feel like a powerful space fighter.

PSYCHO SOLDIER

PRAISE BE TO **ATHENA**

ARCADE, 1986

As soon as you start *Psycho Soldier*, you'll notice there's something a little bit different about the game – how many mid-Eighties arcade games feature vocal theme songs that sound like they could have come straight from a Saturday morning cartoon? The tune has served as a theme for Athena in the *King Of Fighters* series and the Japanese version even got a cassette release, with pop idol Kaori Shimizu providing vocals as she does in the game.

Of course, the theme tune isn't all there is to the game. Playing as Athena or Kensou, your goal is to wander along forced-scrolling levels hopping between platforms, blasting away bad guys. Along the way, you can pick up protective Psycho Ball power-ups and a Psycho Sword that cuts through walls with ease. However, the best thing you can do is transform into a phoenix or dragon and go crazy, breathing fire everywhere – and the second player can even jump on for a ride!



GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES

MARK OF **DISTINCTION**

NEO-GEO, 1999

SNK is a company with a rich history as a developer of fighting games, so it takes something special to be in the conversation for the best one ever – and *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* is a very special game indeed. The final entry in the *Fatal Fury* series jumps into the future and introduces a new cast of characters alongside Terry Bogard – many of them with a connection to the original fighters, including Geese Howard's son Rock.

Every aspect of *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* is superb, from the memorable tunes to the finely-tuned fighting that introduces new mechanics to the series. However, the most immediate impact is made by the game's graphics – the pixel art is of a very high quality as you can see, but what static screenshots can't convey is the astonishing animation, with every character having an extraordinary number of frames. Nearly 20 years on, it's still one of the most attractive 2D games ever developed.



» [Neo-Geo] The artwork on display in *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* is some of SNK's best.

Q&A: THE GAROU MASTERS

Eiichi Ogura, Nobuyuki Kuroki and Yasuyuki Oda on rebooting Fatal Fury



Why was it that SNK decided to reboot *Fatal Fury*?

NK: Actually, the decision to reboot the *Fatal Fury* series was taken by the company, so I don't know that much about the details.

I can say that the characters in *KOF* at that time were very stylish and very popular among fans, while the classic character designs in *Fatal Fury* hadn't changed that much up to then. That's why I believe they decided to remove everything that was considered as 'old' and create a 'brand-new' *Fatal Fury* style.



EO: Many game series were in competition at that time at SNK, and, to be frank, I slightly had the impression that I was considered as a staff dedicated exclusively to the development of the *Fatal Fury* series. I also felt that we would risk boring our fans if we would just keep only adding new characters and minor changes to the series.

Moreover, the fact that Geese Howard, the main antagonist in the series was no longer around was also a huge problem. We decided there to move the clock and storyline forward and revive the series by introducing a new hero with Rock Howard.

How difficult is it to implement new mechanics like the Just Defend system in fighting games?

EO: I guess this was a tough task for the game planners, but for designers like me, the creation of art and assets was very easy thanks to the fact that it was streamlined and systematic in its concept.

YO: Yes, it was a tough task to implement new mechanics such as the Just Defend system.

Is there any reason why there's never been a *Garou* sequel?

NK: I don't exactly know the full details, but I would say that it was due to the dismantlement of the *Fatal Fury* Team at that time.

EO: I was actually involved in the development of the *Garou* sequel, but unfortunately due to SNK's situation at that time, we were never able to complete the project… I also remember that game development was temporarily stopped for a while at that time.

MASTER THE MECHANICS

Learn about the systems introduced in Garou: Mark Of The Wolves

TOP



■ Short for Tactical Offensive Position, this system allows you to select one third of your life bar. As long as your life is in that region, you'll gain a power boost and health regeneration. You can also perform an extra special attack with the C and D buttons.

JUST DEFEND



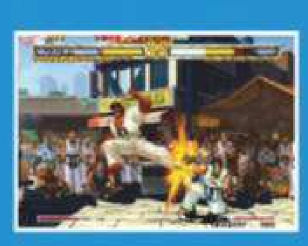
■ If you manage to block an attack at the last moment, you'll perform a Just Defend – this regains some of your health, but more importantly doesn't allow your opponent to build towards a Guard Crush. With good timing, these can be performed consecutively.

GUARD CRUSH



■ Sick of your opponent blocking all your attacks? Just keep hammering away and you'll eventually cause a Guard Crush, which breaks the guard and momentarily stuns your opponent, giving you an opening to start a devastating combo.

COUNTER ATTACKS



■ By pressing A and B together, your character will perform an attack that hops over any incoming low strikes and hits the opponent over the head. If you push the joystick down and press A and B, you'll perform an attack which counters mid/high strikes.



SAMURAI SHODOWN

A CUT **ABOVE**

NEO-GEO, 1993

This clash of swordfighters brought the fighting genre from bare-knuckle brawling into more dangerous territory, with hugely damaging attacks and even the possibility of killing an opponent. The game also introduced the Rage Gauge, a secondary bar which built up as your opponent landed hits. After taking enough punishment, your character would enter the powered up Rage Explosion state allowing for a dramatic comeback. *Samurai Shodown* became very popular in arcades as a result of its high quality and innovation, and kicked off a long-running series. Its characters, including Haohmaru and Nakoruru, became beloved members of the wider SNK world, too.

» [Neo-Geo] Years before the likes of *Soulcalibur, Samurai Shodown* set the standard for weapon-focused fighters.

Q&A: **YASUSHI ADACHI**

The series creator revisits his seminal sword-based fighter



What difference do weapons add to the mechanics of a fighting game?

I think by introducing character deaths and tension in the battle, weapons brought diversity and variety to the game.



Why were so many of the characters taken from Japan's history?

This was also because I always loved samurai and ninja from Japanese history. Haohmaru was called Musashi and Ukyo was called Kojiro during the development of the game. Despite the fact that we changed their names in the middle of the development phase, most of the team members continued to call them Musashi and Kojiro!

What character best sums up the series and why?

Haohmaru and Nakoruru are the two flagship characters. With his use of powerful and damaging attacks as well as the Ikari gauge that increases attack power, Haohmaru does a great job representing the myriad of concepts game systems in these games.

At the same time, Nakoruru is also a main character in the storyline who has to fight for her life and her destiny, and sacrifices herself in the end to preserve an important cause. So, she also represents some of the most important *Samurai Shodown* themes.







NEO TURF MASTERS

ABOVE **PAR**

NEO-GEO, 1996

You don't have to be a golf fan to fall in love with *Neo Turf Masters*. The game was developed by Nazca, a short-lived developer that soon became part of SNK, which chose to put a clear arcade spin on the sport. A full 18 holes are on offer in each of the four courses, and with each hole costing a life you'll need to keep beating par if you want to see them all. Six different golfers are available to play as, from the powerful driver Fernando Almeida to the versatile German master Robert Landolt.

The key to *Neo Turf Masters*' appeal is that everything is accessible, quick and presented with style. The control scheme is simple, so it's the courses themselves and wind conditions that make things tricky, as well as the odd special challenge. Two chirpy announcers add to the sunny atmosphere, enthusiastically shouting "On the green!" and "Birdie!" – or "Oh no!" when you score a bogey.

THE LAST BLADE 2

LOOKING **SHARP**

NEO-GEO, 1998

Astonishingly beautiful games are few and far between, but this sword-slinging sequel is truly one of them. From the animated introduction to the incredible background art and wonderfully atmospheric music, it's a stylistic triumph. The fighting itself manages to be just as exciting, with a diverse cast of characters including swordsmen, shrine maidens and a fisherman who fights with turtles. There's even a choice of speed and power styles to suit your preferred method of cutting down foes.





COOL COOL TOON

TOONS AND TUNES

DREAMCAST, 2000

SNK isn't well known for its music games, but this Japan-exclusive rhythm action title is a treat. Playing as either Amp or Spica, you're dragged into the TV by a cartoon rabbit named Yusa who wants you to clean up Cool Cool Town with your dancing. It's a bit of a bizarre premise but the unique game design utilising the Dreamcast's analogue stick and buttons is rock solid, the tunes are excellent, and Ippei Gyoubu's art gives the game an inimitable style.

CROSSED SWORDS

DON'T CROSS THIS KNIGHT

NEO-GEO, 1991

One of the developers most closely associated with SNK over the years was ADK (or Alpha Denshi), which developed games for all of the company's platforms and ultimately had its library bought by SNK Playmore when it closed in 2003. This early Neo-Geo effort is an excellent example of its work – a fantasy combat game in which you engage in close-up swordfights with enemies, which scale impressively as they leap towards you. There's very little like it out there.





MARVIN'S MAZE

MARVELLOUS MARVIN

ARCADE, 1983

***Marvin's Maze* is a very cool twist on the typical early Eighties maze game formula.** Marvin can collect all the items on each multilevel stage to win, as you might expect. However, he's also got the option of destroying a set number of enemy Robonoids, by removing the ground from under them at certain parts of the stage or with laser pick-ups. Do you play it safe and survive as long as possible, or enter risky confrontations for more points?



BASEBALL STARS

HOME RUN

NES, 1989

If you wanted to enjoy America's favourite pastime from the comfort of your own home, there were few finer ways to do that on the NES than to play *Baseball Stars*. Apart from offering a hugely enjoyable arcade-style take on the sport, the game won fans with its extensive customisation options and unusual themed teams like the Ghastly Monsters. In fact, the game was so good that SNK continued the series on the Neo-Geo and Neo-Geo Pocket.

THE KING OF FIGHTERS XIV

RETURN OF **THE KING**

PS4/PC, 2016

At a time when many fighting games are supplementing small base offerings with big DLC drops, SNK went the other way and loaded the latest *King Of Fighters* with 48 main characters and two bosses before even considering DLC, so there's a huge range of match-ups to try. It's the most accessible entry in the series to date too, with autocombos to help new players start out and a tutorial that introduces you to the game's moves and systems.



THE KING OF FIGHTERS '98

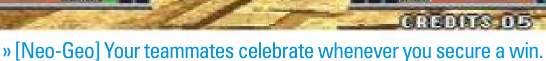
THE ULTIMATE **CROSSOVER**

NEO-GEO, 1998

SNK's decision to make its fifth game in the series non-canon meant it was able to deliver a healthy dose of fan service alongside its excellent fighting mechanics. It remains one of the best games in the series thanks to its extensive character roster, tweaked fighting moves and the opportunity to once again beat up Rugal, who had died in The *King Of Fighters '95*.






» [Neo-Geo] Your teammates celebrate whenever you secure a win.



Q&A: **HIDEKI ASANAKA**

SNK's composer on the importance of music in the popular crossover series



How hard was it to come up with new themes for established regular characters each year?

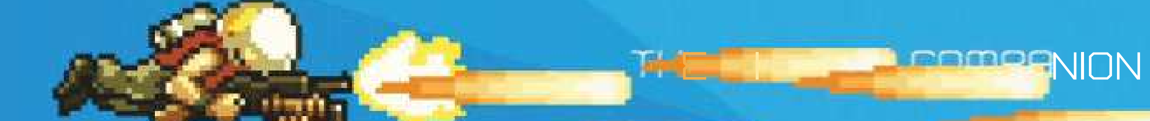
KOF is a game series with an emphasis on its storyline. With Kyo Kusanagi and Iori Yagami as the two main characters of this story, we always made sure their main themes would reflect their current situation in the story. Terry Bogard was simultaneously the face of *Fatal Fury* and of SNK, so we would often just use his theme from the *Fatal Fury* series. It's not like we were forgetting about the other *Fatal Fury* characters, but Terry always tended to be at the forefront thanks to this popularity.

Is it difficult working and remixing existing tracks such as *Psycho Soldier*?

It depended on the titles. The *Psycho Soldier* theme was based around the character of Athena Asamiya, who was a fighter and an idol singer at the same time. We could adapt the new *Psycho Soldier* song to the music trends of that year. However, Geese Howard's theme was a different story and never worked out as easily. As the incarnation of evil, it was really hard to rework his theme, as we didn't have a lot of leeway.

***King Of Fighters '97* had an unusual sound design, using mostly background sounds that fit the scene rather than music. Why was this approach taken?**

As *KOF '97* was the first *KOF* title in which there was no longer one unique stage per team, and the CPU consisted of randomly edited teams, we were unsure how to create team songs after the first three titles. We worried that players wouldn't recognize the team songs when playing the game. Moreover, as *KOF '97* is set as a worldwide tournament broadcasted on TV, and there were requests from the planners to emphasise this aspect of the game.



METAL SLUG 3

THIRD TIME'S **THE CHARM**

NEO-GEO, 2000

Many consider the third game in the *Metal Slug* series to be its best, and it's easy to see why. It features far more expansive levels, that often branched, there's an eclectic range of different Slug vehicles to ride, from the traditional tank to an ostrich, while the bosses are truly formidable and offer a fantastic challenge.



Q&A: **KAZUHIRO TANAKA**

SNK's designer talks sequels, slugs and more

Why do you think many fans feel *Metal Slug 3* is the best in the series?
I was involved on *Metal Slug 1*, *2*, *X*, and *3*, and I think that *Metal Slug 3* was one step above the previous title and a culmination of all the work that went into past titles. I like to think that *Metal Slug* fans understood and appreciated that fact, and there is no higher praise we could have received as developers.

Where did the idea for branching paths originate?
The idea came from *Metal Slug X*, but it was already too late to add it to the game at that phase of development. Therefore, we decided to implement it the next title after further research and experimentation. We know that a lot of *Metal Slug* players play the same games many times, so we wanted to offer them even more fun and variety by adding branching paths in *Metal Slug 3*.

Where did the ideas for the new Slug vehicles originate from?
We come up first with the images of the battle stages, and once that is set we discuss about which Slugs would fit best with the terrain and level design. From there, we start working on concept, ideas, and simple designs. My favourite Slugs are definitely the original SV-001, and the Slug Flyer for its high mobility. I am also a fan of the Animal Slugs such as the Camel Slug, the Ostrich Slug, and the Elephant Slug.



» [Neo-Geo] You may be slow as a zombie, but you're still dangerous.

PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930

SPARED **NO EXPENSE**

ARCADE, 1989

Before the company fully embraced its Neo-Geo hardware, SNK found time to unleash this marvellous reptilian-fuelled shooter. Set on Greenhell Isle, a mysterious island within the Bermuda Triangle, *Prehistoric Isle* tasks you with flying your trusty biplane through an uncharted island and dispensing as many prehistoric beasties as possible. While this shoot-'em-up is incredibly inaccurate, historically speaking, and will have paleontologists brandishing their trowels in anger, it remains a highly entertaining blaster thanks to its exotic enemies, challenging bosses and innovative power-up system.

Graphically it's superb with detailed environments and authentic-looking dinos, many of which are huge and put up a challenge as they chomp, claw and even fireball you into oblivion. The very definition of a coin-guzzler (good luck finishing this on a single credit) and memorable for its downbeat ending, *Prehistoric Isle* was followed by Yumekobo's *Prehistoric Isle 2* in 1999. Despite arriving on a 478 Meg Neo-Geo cartridge, the sequel failed to impress as much as the original.



» [Arcade] Believe it or not, but dinosaurs do not actually explode when you shoot at them with a biplane.



BOSS RUSH

You better take extreme precautions against these prehistoric titans

BRACHIOSAURUS

■ The long neck of this terrible lizard means you'll need to keep your distance or you'll quickly become dinosaur chow. Eep!





ALLOSAURUS

■ This nimble foe not only likes to whip you with its long tail, but isn't afraid to throw a trio of fireballs at you as well.

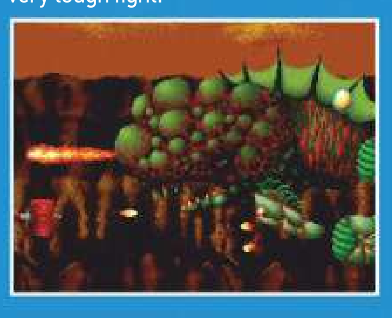
RHAMPHORYNCHUS

■ In addition to steering clear of this beast's ferocious bite, you'll also need to avoid the whirlwinds it throws at you and its numerous plasma blasts.



UNKNOWN DINOSAUR

■ This ugly-looking beast soaks up a tremendous amount of firepower and blasts out dangerous streaks of fire. A very tough fight.





COLEOPTERA

■ This tricky adversary starts off by firing debris at you. After that it splits into smaller versions, which are quite difficult to avoid.

ARCHELON

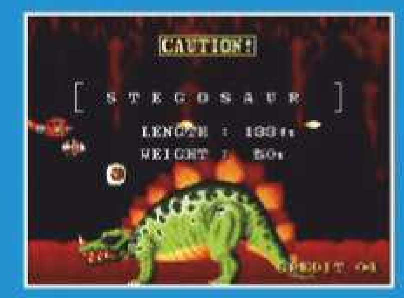
■ It looks cute but this gigantic turtle will constantly chuck babies at you that can't wait to chomp on your delicate vehicle.



AMMONITE

■ This shelled peril has incredibly long arms that prove rather hard to avoid. It's also happy to shoot white-hot plasma at you.





STEGOSAUR

■ What a pain. You need to deal with falling stalactites, avoid Steggo's high jumps and make sure you don't get hit by its electrified spines.

TYRANNOSAUR

■ The game's final boss is a fearsome one. It constantly assaults you with fireballs, which seemingly fill every part of the screen. Time to die. A lot.



BEAST BUSTERS

ALL KILLER, **ALL THRILLER**

ARCADE, 1990

Who would have thought that Michael Jackson was so fond of shooting zombies? According to a *Telegraph* interview with Paul Theroux the king of pop not only loved SNK's brutal on-rails blaster but kept a *Beast Busters* cabinet at his Neverland ranch. It's not hard to see the appeal, as SNK's last arcade game on non-Neo-Geo hardware features excellent visuals, a frenetic pace and hordes of undead monsters to manage with up to two other players.

POW: PRISONER OF WAR

CAPTIVATING **ACTION**

ARCADE, 1988

SNK didn't really make many scrolling fighters during its pre-Neo-Geo games, which is a shame as *POW* proved it certainly had a knack for them. Whereas games like *Final Fight* and *Double Dragon* featured combatants punching their way through gritty city streets, *POW* transported the action to deep jungles and other exotic settings. A three-button system lets you pull off a number of aggressive moves, while machine guns and knives can be picked up to cause further mayhem.





OZMA WARS

SNK'S **ARCADE INVASION**

ARCADE, 1979

Plenty of early arcade companies were inspired by the success of *Space Invaders* and SNK was no exception. *Ozma Wars* still manages to feel notably different from Taito's outing thanks to far more varied enemy patterns, a greater selection of enemies, including meteors and spaceships, and the inclusion of a constantly depleting energy bar. You'll lose significant amounts of energy if you collide with another ship or get shot, but you will restore some if you successfully dock with a mothership.



METAL SLUG ATTACK

A TOWERING MOBILE **SUCCESS**

IOS/ANDROID, 2016

A *Metal Slug* tower defence game sounds like complete and utter madness, but it works surprisingly well. It retains the gorgeous 2D sprite artwork of the earlier games, but the overall *Metal Slug* design has shifted – there are bases on either side of the stage, which must be either protected or destroyed. Action points are used to amass units, which in turn produce further troops, strengthen existing units, or hinder the opponent's forces. It all comes together beautifully, and is rounded off by a large number of enjoyable game modes.

SAMURAI SHODOWN VI

BLADES OF **FURY**

ARCADE, 2005

The last great *Samurai Shodown* game impresses in many areas. Housed on Atomiswave hardware, it features a staggeringly large number of playable fighters, including seven returning characters from the first two games, absolutely sumptuous visuals and a 'Spirit Select' system which essentially allows you to choose from between six different fighting styles. Many consider the PS2 offering (which is found on the *Samurai Shodown Anthology* in the west) to be the definitive version as it adds several additional characters as well as three extra Spirit options.



9001



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